



York Region Rapid Transit Initiative > Communication Strategy

Clear
Constant
Consistent
Communication

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1 *Overview: A Strategic Approach*

One of the most important forces affecting public and private sector programs and projects is public opinion. To be successful in meeting the goals and objectives of York Region's rapid transit program, a **clear and consistent strategy** must be developed to communicate the value of the program and its benefit to both York Region and the Greater Toronto Area.

An overarching goal of the communications strategy is to facilitate the creation of a set of **emotionally compelling messages** that will motivate **behavioural change** in individuals. These messages will:

- Increase the **motivation** of team members to champion the project at every level
- Develop **champions** outside the project team
- Make people get out of their cars and **take transit** in York Region

The strategy outlined in this document will give **general direction** to the communications effort and provide a **framework** within which to consistently direct communication activities around events and queries as York Region's rapid transit program is developed and implemented.

The focus of this document is **strategic** in nature. It outlines a set of communications objectives for the program and sets out a process to develop a set of constantly evolving strategies and tactics to meet these objectives.

Detailed plans will be developed for major initiatives undertaken to provide specific direction and measurable benefits. Additionally, this strategy will be implemented through the ongoing development of a detailed **tactical plan**. A preliminary draft of the tactical plan for the coming year is attached as Appendix A to this document. This plan supports the achievement of the communications objectives outlined in this strategy and the program goals in general.



2 Communications Objectives

This communication strategy has been designed to **create a strategic, disciplined and consistent plan of action** to address the goals and objectives of the project. Strategic **links among stakeholders and project elements** must be identified and every avenue available to consistently and accurately convey the key messages must be explored and exploited. This must be done in the context of project-wide objectives.

The objectives for communications in the coming year are to:

- a. Deliver general public and stakeholder outreach
- b. Create an overall brand and identity for the program and coordinate the communications strategy with the messaging developed through the branding process
- c. Develop and deliver an education component
- d. Provide support for funding the full rapid transit system
- e. Coordinate the development and dissemination of messaging with other transit authorities and local governments
- f. Provide continued enhancements to the Web site as a key communications tool for the program
- g. Provide continued support to Environmental Assessments that are ongoing as well as to the Bernard North Corridor Environmental Assessment scheduled to commence in 2004
- h. Provide support to the development and launch of *Quick Start* as the initial phase of YRTP

The first three objectives relate to communicating the overall scope of the rapid transit program to the public and developing a constituency to provide public support. This will give the program a solid base to move forward as continued funding is secured for the overall program.



3 *Stakeholder Strategies*

In a program of this magnitude, there are numerous stakeholders that must be kept connected and informed. These stakeholders form the “**message universe**” for the project. During the first year of the program, communication was primarily focused on discourse among professionals, experts and government officials, toward the goal of developing a business plan and acquiring the first tranche of funding. The notable exception to this was the communications efforts undertaken as part of the public process related to the Environmental Assessment studies ongoing along the transit corridors.

In the coming year, the focus of communication will increase in breadth to further reach out into the community. The mode of communication must move from being technically driven toward **simpler, clearer communication** with the general public. While the requirements for providing detailed technical communication in support of continued program funding remain, the message universe now includes a new set of public stakeholders who need to learn about the program, buy in to it and, eventually, **get on board**.

First and foremost is the need to **clearly define the message**. A key aspect in the communication of the program is the development of a brand identity for rapid transit, the newest addition to the “family of transit services” already operating in the Region. York Consortium 2002 has selected Gee Jeffery and Partners to develop a **brand and marketing communications** strategy for York’s rapid transit program.

External communications are broadly divided into three areas: public awareness and education, government relations strategy and media strategy. Within each area are a variety of interrelated stakeholders that can be further subdivided as described in the sections that follow.

In addition to the need for external communication, and as important, is the need for internal communication within the project team. **Internal stakeholders** must be kept abreast of important project developments. The project team members are the front line communicators who begin the process of spreading the rapid transit message.

The following five sections describe the strategic approach to communication in the areas of brand development, public awareness and education, government relations strategy, media strategy and internal communications.



3.1 Branding

What is a brand? A singular idea or concept that you own inside the mind of the prospect.¹ As a **persuasive force** capable of altering people's preconceptions and behaviour, the new brand for York's rapid transit service must:

- **Change people's perceptions** of mass transit
- Define a **unique position** for rapid transit relative to other transit options
- **Capture the imagination** of citizens, policy makers and partners
- Build **brand equity** for the present and the future

In concert with the evolution of the brand/identity process, **key messages** will be developed that will be clearly understood and supported, convey a vision for a better future and capture stakeholders' imagination. The brand will be integral to garnering and sustaining support for rapid transit and, ultimately, **increasing transit ridership**.

York Region Transit service has established a recognizable brand in York – YRT. The extensive brand and identity work undertaken by York Region Transit during its service launch in 2001 will inform the development of brand for a recognizable rapid transit service within York, both distinct from and **complementary to the existing YRT** brand. The brand/identity program will build upon existing work in the area of transit service identity to optimally position rapid transit, the newest addition to York's family of transit services.

An outcome of the brand process is the creation of a detailed **marketing communications plan** that will include the campaigns required to launch Quick Start. The plan will identify key communication vehicles (paid media, PR etc.) for delivery of messaging to target audiences. The launch campaigns will begin at an appropriate time in advance of revenue service in order to build excitement and support for the program and induce people to try out the new service.

As the brand is developed, it will permeate all aspects of the program, become increasingly cohesive and reinforce the core communication message(s). The brand will facilitate the ability of internal stakeholders to communicate with clarity and creativity as they interact with external parties. The goal is to change perceptions and behaviour to the extent that **rapid transit becomes not just an option, but a preferred mode of transportation in York**.

¹ Al Ries and Laura Ries, "The 22 Immutable Laws Of Branding: How to Build a Product or Service into a World-Class Brand," Harpercollins Canada, Limited, September 2002.



3.2 Public Awareness and Education

The **public is a key stakeholder** group to be addressed in this strategy. General outreach communication efforts will capture the imagination of residents and businesses in York Region. By increasing the profile of YRTP, the goal is to **develop and maintain public awareness and support** and, ultimately, to **increase transit ridership** for the public transit family of services.

Individual residents, business owners and employees are all included in this group, which includes:

- Members of the **general public**:
 - Those abutting the proposed rapid transit lines
 - Property owners/residents in the immediate vicinity of the project
 - Residents in the wider York Region area municipalities
 - Those living in the surrounding areas outside York Region
 - Existing **transit riders**/customers, including:
 - Existing YRT customers
 - GO Transit riders arriving at/departing from York Region
 - Transit riders transferring to/from other local municipal transit services (e.g. TTC, Brampton Transit, Mississauga Transit etc.)
- The developer community
- Large employers with internal organizations (IBM, Motorola, CN, York University)
- Small/medium businesses (often members of Chambers of Commerce)
- Community groups (Heritage Groups, Service Clubs such as Rotary, Lions Club etc.)
- Ratepayer groups (usually brought together by a common local interest)
- Institutions (educational institutions, hospitals, public libraries etc.)

General Public

A **community outreach** program has been developed, which is designed to enhance public awareness of the rapid transit program, generate goodwill in the community, and stimulate grassroots support and interest. This program will be expanded into 2004 and, where practical and desirable, will be coordinated with similar efforts undertaken by YRT as part of their ongoing marketing communications plan. Appendix B outlines a series of community events taking place in York Region over the next several months. Appendix C is a briefing note describing the results of YRTP's participation at one such event, "A Taste of Asia," in August 2003.

The **YRTP Web site** has become a key communication tool. The near ubiquitous nature of the internet and the ability to provide timely information



to large numbers of people makes it an integral part of this plan. In addition to being the key source for current information on the project and its progress, the Web site may be used to launch a **quarterly e-newsletter** to promote various aspects of the program and further build support for the project.

The public participation solicited as part of the **Environmental Assessment** process has been the main vehicle through which community awareness has been initiated. This process will continue to be supported throughout year two in the ongoing community consultation required for the Highway 7 and Markham N/S Link Environmental Assessment studies as well as the Bernard North Corridor Environmental Assessment scheduled to commence in 2004. As with previous Environmental Assessment studies undertaken for the other transit corridors, the YRTP team will arrange and host public information meetings/open houses, track comments and requests for additional materials, and document all communications to support the process.

A **launch plan** will be developed for *Quick Start* as part of the marketing communications plan undertaken in the branding process. Communication campaigns will be developed to:

- Inform the public about the start and scope of construction and construction progress
- Help to establish and build the new brand
- Set the groundwork for the service rollout in 2005

A **construction liaison officer** will also play a key role in ensuring that inconvenience due to construction is minimized. Specialized and targeted collateral materials will be provided to ensure that abutting property owners/residents/business are thoroughly apprised of potential impacts during construction.

Education is part of the overall project scope and a key to stakeholder communication. The education component will have two specific goals: educating the general public about the benefits of public transit, including land use related to smart growth and the reduction of gridlock; and educating children about their future transportation needs.

The majority of materials developed for other public consultation and outreach will all have an element of education for the general public. A special **education campaign** is being developed to reach children in order to launch their understanding of the importance transit plays in their lives. The work that has been undertaken by YRT in conjunction with the local boards of education will inform the process for developing a strong education component.



Community/Special Interest Groups

The YRTP team has given over 100 **presentations** to community and special interest groups over the past year. This is anticipated to continue and increase with the activation of a **speakers' bureau** to facilitate the team's continued participation in presentations to the community.

The **round table discussions** with stakeholder groups such as the developer meetings which have been underway for a number of months will continue into the second year as they provide a clear insight into the needs of these special interest groups. Ensuring that the developer community remains engaged is also important to achieving the larger land use goal of increasing urbanization envisioned by the extension of rapid transit throughout York Region.

3.3 Government Relations Strategy

Government includes:

- Elected officials at the federal and provincial government levels
- Senior staff of federal and provincial governments
- Elected officials at the regional and municipal levels
- Senior staff of regional and municipal governments
- External agencies that have some jurisdiction over a part of the project or its implementation (Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, emergency services, National Transportation Agency, TTC, GO Transit, etc.)

Building on the success of obtaining funding for Quick Start, the thrust of the government relations strategy in the coming year focuses on obtaining the funding required to build the full rapid transit system. The ongoing involvement and **support of senior levels of government** is critical to the continued success of YRTP.

Many of the efforts undertaken to secure *Quick Start* funding are being repeated, including **rounds of meetings** with politicians and political staff at various levels and in various ministries. The goal is to continue to increase political awareness, understanding and support by supplying timely and accurate information to politicians, political influencers and government staff, and thereby secure the approvals and funding necessary to advance the full system.

Although many of the materials prepared for public consultation can be used as the basis, **specialized materials** will also be required that specifically address the needs of the various audiences for this initiative. These specialized materials must focus on both the project and the policy goals of the respective governments, be consistent with all other project materials, and be



capable of standing alone for the liaison effort. The goal is to ensure broad political access by addressing the interests of both existing and potential government parties.

A **government relations program plan** has been developed and the business plan updated to support the request for the next tier of funding. New sources of funding will be sought and applications submitted as appropriate. While the political level of government is the ultimate decision making body, the information upon which decisions are made is filtered through the senior staff level. Hence, government relations activities will also ensure that accurate and timely information is provided to the senior staff level of government, as appropriate. Where possible, communication initiatives will be linked to provincial and federal programs and initiatives.

A protocol and process for **communication coordination** is being developed in accordance with the **requirements of the provincial and federal funding agreements** for *Quick Start*. Existing communication materials must be revised and all future materials designed to incorporate an acknowledgement of the participation of these two levels of government in funding the rapid transit program (appropriate signage must be maintained on construction sites etc.).

At the municipal level, **coordinated messaging** and the dissemination of information among all stakeholder agencies and local governments are important to obtaining buy-in and support. All contact with agencies is monitored and tracked to ensure that messages and information are consistent. All presentations and meetings are documented.

3.4 Media Strategy

The mainstream news media greatly **influences public opinion**. In order to favourably position YRTP in the eyes of the public, a media strategy integrated with other YRTP communications initiatives (e.g. public participation in the Environmental Assessment process) has been developed. The **objective** of the strategy is to encourage more **accurate, balanced reporting** in the mass media about the YRTP.

The program's key media **targets** are:

- **National** media (Star, Globe & Mail, National Post, CBC, CTV, etc.)
- **Local** media (Metroland, community newspapers, magazines, community television)
- **Trade** press (CUTA Forum, engineering journals, public private partnership organizations, business magazines, etc.)



In order to favourably position YRTP in the press, a **short-term media campaign** is being launched around events that:

- Create awareness
- Educate/inform re: rapid transit benefits
- Excite and induce trial of new transit system
- Convert drivers to riders
- Address recurring misconceptions and adverse opinion appearing in local press

With the continued assistance of the Region's Corporate Communications Services Division, which manages all media contact on behalf of the Region, the focus over the next twelve months is to utilize various media tactics and avenues to launch a series of **"good news" stories** about YRTP and *Quick Start*. Appendix D outlines a series media generation tactics, story opportunities and proposals aimed at achieving the media objectives.

3.5 Internal Stakeholders

Among the goals of the communications strategy is the need to create a set of emotionally compelling messages that will not only change behaviour in external targets, but will also increase the motivation of team members internal to the project. The project participants are the front line communicators who begin the process of championing the inception of rapid transit in York Region.

Internal Stakeholders include:

- Staff internal to the project
- Public and private sector team members in the various project areas (communications, transportation, environmental, etc.)
- Regional and municipal staff as well as other employees of York Consortium

Numerous strategies may be employed to facilitate knowledge and information sharing among team members. The introduction of **"Active Project"** software in the project office developed for document control and file sharing among team members has improved access to information among team members. **"Lunch and learn"** sessions provide an opportunity for individuals to expand the breadth of their project knowledge in areas outside their particular focus of expertise as well as reinforce the key messages developed through the branding process. Project staff has also been invited to participate in **community outreach** activities on an ongoing basis and those who have done so have reported being enriched by the contact with members of the public eager to see a rapid transit system built in their community.



Project specialists with specific knowledge in various aspects of the program (transit planning, intelligent transportation systems, design etc.) will have opportunities to participate in **speaker and media** training to enhance their ability to communicate in these forums.

A key part of the success of YRTP is ensuring that the information requirements of the very large project team assembled to undertake this aggressive program are met. These **informational needs** include both the transfer of data from one project area to another to facilitate the coordination of work efforts, as well as more general communication “talking points” as each team member has a role as a front line communicator/ambassador for the program outside his/her specific job.

4 Implementation

A **step-wise rollout** of the elements of this strategy must be timed to take into account deadlines for program requirements, external announcements, requirements pursuant to the Environmental Assessment process and the completion of key background information and materials.

Individual plans are being developed to identify specific informational needs of each stakeholder group, relevant to their respective issues and interests. Communication with stakeholders must be planned and directed with clearly prioritized objectives.

Each approach to achieving these objectives must be reviewed against the cost to implement it. Communications for YRTP are being **coordinated with existing York Region Transit** marketing and communications efforts to ensure optimal effectiveness in terms of both message and cost.

The key communications elements for which **detailed communication plans** are being developed are:

- **Marketing Communications (Brand/Identity)**
- **General Public Outreach**
- **Education**
- **Community/business group outreach**
- **Ongoing Funding**

Individual communication plans will provide implementation details and generally follow the following format:



- a. Reason for Plan
- b. Role in Larger Communication Effort
- c. Challenges
- d. Assumptions
- e. Audience(s)
- f. Goal
- g. Objectives
- h. Message(s)
- i. Implementation strategies (the “what” and the “why” of the plan)
- j. Tactics (the “when”, “where” and “how” of the plan)
- k. Budget
- l. Measurement/Evaluation

This communication strategy is a living document. Information and insight gained through the development and implementation of each individual communication plan, beginning with the brand/identity activities, will inform and provide feedback to further refine the overall strategy.