



ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES

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Best Practice Summary Report October 2005

Urban Transit – Service Expansion

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Practice Identification: Service Expansion

Case Study Municipality: York Region

Benefits Resulting from the Practice:

- ~ Increased ridership
- ~ Increased ridership per capita performance

Description of the Practice in the Case-study Municipality

York Region Transit (YRT) provides transit service to the communities of York Region. In 2001, YRT was formed as the amalgamation of 5 transit systems serving the municipalities of Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Aurora and Newmarket.

In 2000, the individual municipalities served a total population of approximately 600,000, and carried approximately 7.2 million passengers on conventional transit, an average of approximately 12 passengers per capita.

Based on the 2003 MPMP data, YRT was identified as a system that, while not at the top performance level in its population group, had made significant increases in its performance of either or both of the key indicators, or in combined performance, over the 2002 data. In this respect, YRT is the best improved system in the over 400,000 population group, with a 10 percent increase in ridership per capita, and the second lowest increase in cost per trip (all systems in this category except Hamilton reported an increase in cost per trip, ranging from 3 percent to 9 percent).

YRT staff attributes this increase to their on-going efforts to increase service levels throughout the region, tapping into unmet demand. YRT made small service improvements in 2001, but in 2002 began significantly increasing service.

Historically, services were focused on key corridors, with consideration for integration of cross-boundary services, but local service levels were typically much lower, and many small communities were underserved or not served at all.

Beginning in 2002, YRT embarked on a process of increasing service, both in terms of coverage and service levels, which has continued through 2005. New services were added, span of service was extended, service frequencies in existing areas were increased, key urban connections were enhanced, and service was introduced in several smaller communities.

Evaluation of the Practice

In 2001, in its first year of operation, YRT did not make significant changes in the overall transit service as it dealt with administrative and contract details. In that year, the service area population grew from approximately 580,000 to approximately 635,000 (9.3 percent) while ridership grew in a similar proportion (7 percent) and ridership per capita declined slightly.

In 2002, YRT began to expand its services, significantly expanding its service area and accommodating new population growth within its existing service area. In 2002, the service area population grew to approximately 800,000 (26 percent) and the amount of service was increased by almost one-third, from 350,000 hours to more than 450,000 hours. At the same time, ridership grew to approximately 8.4 million (just over 10 percent). As a result, ridership per capita fell from approximately just less than 12 per capita to about 10.5 trips per capita.

This decline was to be expected, since ridership takes some time to develop and respond to changes. Accordingly, cost per trip over this period also increased substantially, from \$3.25 to \$4.26.

In 2003 however, ridership began to respond to the service increases, including continued expansion of service. In 2003, YRT's service area population grew approximately 5 percent to 842,000, and service was expanded approximately 25 percent. Ridership in 2003 grew more than 21 percent to more than 10.2 million, increasing the trips per capita to more than 12.1 per capita, exceeding previous high levels.

A preliminary review of 2004 data indicates that this trend has continued, with new ridership increasing approximately 15 percent, compared to a population increase of 4.5 percent, resulting in even higher trips per capita.

Replication of the Best Practice

Few transit systems in Ontario are in a similar position to York Region in terms of the amalgamation of services and the opportunity to bring a fresh start to service provision at the regional level (Durham Region, which begins Regional service on January 1, 2006, amalgamating the services of Ajax-Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa being the exception).

In 2002, Sudbury Transit increased service hours by approximately 15 percent (and service kilometers by more than 20 percent to serve outlying communities), and continued this process in 2003. By the end of 2003, after initial declines, trips per capita performance had recovered and begun to exceed previous levels. In 2004, service hours were increase a further 10 percent with the addition of new commuter runs, and ridership has responded in 2005 with increases of more than 10 percent with a stable population. These examples illustrate the effect and benefit of increasing transit services, both in terms of new services to new areas, and also by increasing levels of service to existing areas.

These examples show the potential for riders to respond to service level increases, the investment necessary to deal with initial declines in performance to allow ridership the necessary time to respond, and the long-term benefit to the system and passengers. It is important for systems to recognize the time required for ridership to respond to service changes, and account for this lag in ridership and revenue estimates. This difference is also an important planning consideration, highlighting the need to maintain services after their introduction, to give ridership sufficient time to respond.

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