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YORK REGION TRANSIT/VIVA AND A CHANNEL PARTNERSHIP PILOT

The Joint Transit and Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee recommends:

- 1. The presentation by Mary Lou Johnston, Manager, Marketing and Customer Services, be received; and**
- 2. The recommendations contained in the following report, June 14, 2005 from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works and the Vice President of the York Region Rapid Transit Corporation be adopted.**

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve a six-month pilot project from August 1, 2005 to January 31, 2006 with the A Channel to provide live York Region Transit-Viva updates from the Transit Operations Centre at 50 High Tech Road.
2. Staff report back to Regional Council in January, 2006 with an update on the partnership and a recommendation on extending the agreement.
3. Regional Council authorize staff to develop co-branding advertising opportunities between YRT-Viva and the A Channel.
4. The Regional Solicitor prepare the necessary contract documents.
5. The Regional Chair and Clerk be authorized to sign the necessary contract documents on behalf of the Region.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to highlight the opportunity to partner with the A Channel to provide people throughout York Region with live transit updates during the morning and evening rush hours, and to seek Regional Council approval to enter into a six-month pilot project agreement.

In this report, staff are also seeking Committee and Council approval to develop co-branding advertising opportunities to promote both YRT-Viva and the new A Channel, possibly in community newspapers and on York Region Transit (YRT) buses.

3. BACKGROUND

In March, 2005 representatives from the CHUM Group approached the Region to begin exploratory talks regarding a partnership between YRT-Viva and The New VR.

York Region will be launching Viva, its innovative new rapid transit system, in September and, at the same time, CHUM TV will be retiring The New VR and launching its fresh new A Channel brand. The A Channel will be much more than just a new name since CHUM is making significant investments to position the A Channel as York Region's dedicated TV station. Beginning late this summer the A Channel will expand its news centres into Markham and Vaughan.

Following a meeting in March with the Regional Chair, the A Channel presented York Region staff with a proposal to broadcast live, 45-second transit updates six times in the morning and at least two times during the evening news from Monday to Friday.

During CITY TV's Breakfast Television program, the A Channel is planning to have live inserts that would include York Region news, traffic and transit updates. YRT-Viva would be mentioned by the host when the segment is introduced, the logos would be on screen when the transit reporter is speaking, and YRT-Viva would have an opportunity to promote local events on-air. According to CHUM, this is the largest morning show in Canada, with 1.3 million viewers each week.

The same promotional opportunities would be available in the evening. Currently, the New VR reaches more than 3.8 million viewers each week, including 245,000 viewers in York Region.

As well as live transit updates, the YRT-Viva transit segments will be promoted in A Channel traffic advertisements, and links will be established between the YRT and Viva Web sites to the A Channel site.

The proposal also raised the possibility of exploring cross-promotional opportunities between YRT-Viva and the A Channel as they both launch new services in September. The A Channel has expressed an interest in co-branded ads for community newspapers and on YRT buses.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

This is a partnership that will provide potential benefits for both YRT-Viva and the A Channel.

The Viva rapid transit service is being launched this September, and although staff are implementing an extensive grassroots marketing, communications and outreach campaign, it is not cost effective to develop and purchase mainstream television advertising. In the report to the Rapid Transit Steering Committee and Council on March 30, 2005, staff indicated that the bulk of the ads promoting Viva would be placed in community and ethnic newspapers, community TV, 680 radio news, GO platforms, mall posters, campus posters, billboards and cinema ads.

By establishing this partnership with the A Channel, YRT-Viva would have a regular presence on mainstream television, touching tens of thousands of viewers daily at minimal cost. This television exposure would not only raise awareness of the family of transit services available in York Region, including Viva, it would provide people with minute-by-minute transit information during the morning and evening rush hours.

The transit reporter could effectively communicate route changes, delays, accidents, construction areas and special community events for both YRT and Viva. These transit updates would be another important benefit to attract a whole new generation of passengers.

Through this partnership, the A Channel would establish a solid foothold in the community. Their viewers would have access to real-time transit information that is only available from the YRT-Viva operations centre. Our transit reporter would play a significant role in the success of the A Channel's morning and evening news and information programs.

4.1 YRT-Viva Transit Reporter Position

The YRT-Viva reporter would be responsible for gathering and delivering real time and breaking transit information during live segments on the A Channel. For the first six months, two energetic Team Viva members would be approached to take on these additional responsibilities. The A Channel has agreed to provide training and direction as the reporters develop their on-air skills.

4.1.1 AM Shift

The reporter would fill six 45 second segments during the Breakfast TV show which runs from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. Monday to Friday.

The reporter would be responsible for allowing enough time before the show to gather the appropriate information from the operations centre, the YRT-Viva community event

calendar, the YRT and Viva Web sites, the A Channel newsroom, etc., and write a 30-45 second script.

The reporter would be required to call the show producer, test the equipment and be in position to comfortably deliver the report. It will be the reporter's responsibility to ensure he or she is presentable for TV (meeting A Channel standards) as he or she would be a YRT-Viva Ambassador.

The reporter would be holding a clipboard and either sitting or standing in front of a stationary camera in the YRT-Viva operations centre. The reporter would have an ear piece in order to receive audio cues from the television control room, and, when the cue is given, deliver the report and sign-off.

Between segments, the reporter would be required to update the information and lookout for breaking news, such as accidents, storms, etc. If something of note occurs, the reporter would contact the producer and possibly break in with a live update.

4.1.2 PM Shift

The reporter would fill at least two 45 second segments during the 5:30 pm and 6:00 pm shows. The process would be the same as the AM shift.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

After careful evaluation, staff from both the A Channel and York Region are proposing the breakdown of costs and responsibilities as outlined in the tables below. To make live transit reports a reality, the Region would provide the on-air staff, the location, and the content through the GPS tracking software. Each of these requirements already exists: existing Viva staff would be utilized, the location would be the YRT/Viva control centre, and the GPS tracking software is already a part of the Viva technology. The A Channel would be required to invest in broadcast quality equipment, the Bell line to their Vaughan studio, and the on-air time.

Both York Region and the A Channel have made significant investments in infrastructure to prepare for their perspective launches in September. After comparing the two tables below, staff on both sides have agreed that this is a fair and reasonable breakdown of financial responsibility. The financial review of assets outlined in the tables below is of equal value to both the Region and the A Channel, and therefore no additional costs would be incurred to launch this six-month pilot project. Supplies and Services staff have been informed of this project and have indicated that it complies with the Region's purchasing by-law.

Table 1
YRT/Viva Costs and Responsibilities

YRT-Viva	Cost
Two on-air Staff (AM and PM reporter)	\$50,000 annually
Operations Centre location	\$54,000 approx. annual cost
GPS Tracking Software (content)	\$213,000 annually

Table 2
A Channel Costs and Responsibilities

A Channel	Cost
Equipment investment (camera, lighting, microphone, audit set up, Bell Cable)	\$85,615 one time cost
Bell Line Fee	\$18,000 annually
On-Air Exposure	\$100,000 to \$250,000 approx. annual cost

There are no financial implications associated with this initiative in 2005, over and above those noted in Table 1 which are already included in the 2005 Business Plan and Budget. A decision will have to be made with respect to the reporter position for 2006 at the conclusion of the pilot. Staff will report back to Regional Council in January, 2006 with an update on the partnership and recommendation on extending the agreement.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

People throughout York Region and the GTA will have access to real time transit information on a daily basis. Before leaving home, they will be able to tune into the A Channel and find out about route changes, delays, accidents, or construction. They will also be able to find out about YRT-Viva participation at community events.

7. CONCLUSION

York Region is breaking new ground with respect to public transit. Although bus rapid transit may be familiar in other jurisdictions around the globe, this unique system is relatively foreign in the Greater Toronto Area. By partnering with the A Channel to provide live transit updates, staff can enhance the current Viva marketing and communication plan. In fact, this widespread television exposure will raise the profile of the family of transit services available in York Region by providing residents with current transit information, and another reason to leave their cars at home.

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And the Rapid Transit Public/Private Partnership Steering Committee
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Staff from both York Region and the A Channel have entered these discussions in a spirit of cooperation and partnership. This is seen as a win-win proposition for both partners as York Region seeks to promote its significant investment in the new Viva rapid transit system, and the A Channel attempts to market its new brand and make inroads into the Region.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.