

# The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole  
Transportation Services  
April 8, 2021

Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services

## York Region Transit 2020 System Performance Report

### 1. Recommendation

Council receive this report for information.

### 2. Summary

This report provides Council with an overview of York Region Transit (YRT) 2020 system performance.

Key Points:

- COVID-19 significantly impacted transit services across the country. Staff responded with the implementation of health and safety measures to protect staff, contractors, and travellers.
- York Region Transit reduced service, and internal operational cost reductions were put in place to address the financial impact from COVID-19
- Approximately 15,000 citizens used YRT services for their daily commute, a decrease of 61% over 2019
- YRT Mobility On-Request service was implemented in areas where conventional transit was cancelled due to COVID-19 and this provided options for travellers who relied on transit to connect with the rest of the system for work, shopping and medical appointments
- Projects identified in the Region's business plan prior to COVID-19 were delivered, including the opening of 17 new kilometres of bus rapidway, operating the Region's first electric buses, the purchase of the Newmarket Bus Terminal and completion of several asset management-related programs
- Fare integration continued to be a priority as staff collaborated with Metrolinx and other Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) transit agencies to harmonize fare age categories, begin the process of setting fare policy, and identify needed technology to support fare and service integration across the GTHA

### 3. Background

#### **York Region Transit delivers a variety of services to meet the unique needs of communities across the Region**

York Region's large geographic area and unique mix of rural, suburban, and urban communities require YRT operations and services to be managed economically and innovatively while delivering transit service in all nine local municipalities.

A variety of service types are offered to travellers:

- Viva bus rapid transit
- Conventional base routes – operate on major arterial corridors
- Local routes – operate in neighbourhoods
- High school specials – provide direct services to high schools
- GO Shuttles – Provide direct service to GO train stations
- Seasonal services – operate to key destinations such as recreational facilities, shopping malls and amusement parks
- Mobility On-Request (Conventional) – fully accessible, on-demand transit service designed to provide immediate local travel within a defined geographical area, where demand for transit service is low
- Mobility On-Request (Para/Specialized) – door-to-door, shared-ride, accessible public transit service for people with disabilities

Efficiencies and service effectiveness were realized in 2020 by implementing alternative service strategies, including operating six electric vehicles on various routes and expanding Mobility On-Request Conventional services into low-transit demand areas.

### 4. Analysis

#### **Due to COVID-19, YRT 2020 ridership was reduced to 10.7M compared to 22.9M in 2019**

Transit agencies across the country experienced significant ridership and revenue decrease throughout 2020 due to COVID-19. Transit continued to operate throughout 2020 as the Province designated transit as an essential service.

By the end of 2020, YRT ridership was less than half of 2019 ridership (Attachment 1) and fare revenues totalled \$31M compared to \$74M in 2019. As an additional safety precaution, travellers were required to board buses using the middle or rear doors from April 2020 to July 2020. Travellers were encouraged to continue to pay their fare using on-street and terminal PRESTO machines and the YRT mobile app. Provincial lockdowns and messaging that travel on transit was for essential trips only further affected overall ridership.

To help manage fare revenue loss, service changes were quickly implemented to better match transit travel and reduce both internal and external operating costs.

Mobility On-Request service was expanded into areas that did not have available conventional bus service. With this, Mobility On-Request ridership decreased by only 4.4% to 39,255 in 2020 from 41,070 in 2019 (Attachment 2). Specialized paratransit service ridership reached 152,951 in 2020, representing a decrease of 64% when compared to 427,389 travellers in 2019. This was primarily due to the cancellation of day programs and other support services.

### **Several initiatives were quickly implemented in response to COVID-19 to keep staff, contractors and the public safe**

By the end of March 2020, it was clear additional actions were required to keep the YRT system operational throughout the pandemic. Staff coordinated with other transit agencies to deliver key COVID-19-related initiatives, including:

- Ongoing communications at terminals, stations, and on-bus, using social media, local newspapers and the YRT and York Region websites to promote and educate travellers on safety requirements while using transit (masks, boarding, keeping distance)
- Enhanced cleaning of buses and Mobility On-Request vehicles and high-touch areas at stations, terminals, and garages
- Issued Public Health-recommended personal protective equipment to all front-line staff
- Installed over 500 operator barriers in buses and Mobility On-Request vehicles
- Transit Bylaw amendment passed to include mandatory wearing of masks or face coverings while on YRT property and buses
- Implemented operational safety plans to all contractors related to personal protective equipment and standard operating procedures
- Revised and updated emergency operation plans and provided additional training to all front-line staff to meet York Region Public Health recommendations

### **Key initiatives were delivered with a focus on traveller experience, safety and the environment**

Despite COVID-19, 2020 programs were delivered to advance YRT and corporate strategies. Primary deliverables completed in 2020 included:

- Purchased the Newmarket Bus Terminal and facility modifications completed to improve lighting, installation of HVAC and mechanical equipment, roadway rehabilitation, minor civil repairs, and installation of a terminal electric bus charging station

- The contract was awarded for the newly-integrated South West and North Division with an hourly operating rate of 1.4% lower than the average contractor hourly operating rate.
- Put into operation six YRT electric buses and began data collection and analysis to inform the program's business case. An additional approved six electric buses will be delivered in 2021.
- Transportation Services Vehicle Electrification Plan approved, which will see YRT buses converted to greenhouse gas emission-free technology by 2047.
- Replaced all PRESTO equipment to modernize technology.
- Adjusted fare age categories across the YRT system to match those across the 416 and 905 areas.
- Developed 2021 Annual Transit Initiatives, a five-year business plan and an update to the MOR Service Plan
- Opened the last two segments of the Viva Rapidway along Yonge Street
- Implementation of 2020 and 2021 service changes previously approved by Council, including the expansion of MOR into the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville and Township of King
- Accepted delivery of ten 60-foot articulated buses and put into revenue service
- Refurbished 65 buses to extend operational vehicle lifecycle
- Replaced 103 concrete bus stop pads and installed 41 new pads
- Upgraded 35 bus shelters and installed 23 new ones throughout the Region
- Awarded the Canadian Urban Transit Association award for Innovation for the YRT Travel Training program
- Awarded two distinct recognitions for the yrt.ca website: 2020 APEX Award of Excellence and 2019 MarCom Gold Award

### **A focus on fare and service integration initiatives continued throughout 2020**

Fare and service integration work continued in 2020 following Council approval on [September 10, 2020](#), to harmonize YRT concession fares with other GTHA transit agencies. The harmonization of fare age categories establishes a common fare structure, simplifies travel, and provides clarity for customers and is the first step towards fare integration.

YRT and Toronto Transit Commission commenced a joint review focusing on fare policy and a future fare collection strategy that will support the ability of GTHA transit agencies to better integrate services.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the provincial government identified fare and service integration as a vital tool in the restart of the economy. As a result, staff have been further reviewing fare and service integration opportunities with other GTHA transit agencies.

### **In 2021 staff continue to manage the impact of COVID-19 on transit ridership and revenues while planning for post-pandemic ridership recovery**

Staff continue to focus on fare and service integration through collaboration with the Province and the other Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Transit Agencies. Health and safety measures implemented to help protect staff, contractor employees and travellers from COVID-19 will also continue throughout 2021. Staff are also managing service levels based on ridership demand and in keeping with the Council-approved 2021 budget.

Looking towards 2022 and beyond, service plans to support ridership recovery post-pandemic are under development. Mackenzie West Bus Terminal construction is underway, with scheduled completion in 2022. Six electric buses are slated for delivery in the summer of 2021, with electrical upgrades to support the YRT bus fleet conversion included in current and future bus garage expansions.

A system resumption plan will be created to identify how transit services will be reinstated along major corridors, including routes identified as part of the Frequent Transit Network, Express Bus Network and the Viva system in York Region.

## **5. Financial**

### **Agencies sought federal and provincial funding to keep transit operating throughout 2020**

In [May 2020](#), Council supported efforts made by associations such as the Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario, Canadian Urban Transit Association and Ontario Public Transit Association to help voice to the federal and provincial governments the impacts of COVID-19 and the struggle municipalities are facing to maintain operations during challenging times.

The provincial Transit Enhanced Cleaning Funding Program and the *Safe Restart Agreement* resulted from these efforts.

Transit Enhanced Cleaning Funding Program reimbursed transit agencies for additional costs incurred for enhanced cleaning of buses, garages, stations and terminals. The Region was allocated \$661,031 for costs incurred between April 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020.

Through the *Safe Restart Agreement*, under phase 1, the Region was allocated \$17.1M for eligible expenses from April 1, 2020 to September 30, 2020. Under phase 2, the Region will be allocated up to \$21.4M for use towards eligible expenses incurred between October 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021. In addition, the Province announced phase 3 funding allocation of \$16.7M for COVID-19-related financial impacts and costs relating to transit initiatives incurred between April 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021.

## **Through efforts to reduce overall costs of operating, and with federal and provincial funding, the financial impact of COVID-19 was offset in 2020**

In 2020, fare revenue totalled \$31M compared to \$74M in 2019. Additional revenue of \$23K was received through shelter advertising. Fare revenue loss was directly impacted because of COVID-19 measures put into place at the provincial and federal levels, including mandatory social distancing, travelling only for essential trips and rear door boarding for travellers using the system.

Service changes to find efficiencies, both planned and due to COVID-19, resulted in a savings of approximately \$27M.

Cost savings included the expansion of YRT's Mobility On-Request service replacing several conventional routes having low ridership pre-pandemic. This change in service type resulted in a 90% reduction in cost per passenger trip and continued to provide travellers with access to transit. In 2021, a fiscal and service analysis of Mobility On-Request service will be conducted to identify value for money to operate the service compared with other On-Request-type services available. Findings will be presented to Council in 2022.

Total savings, other than from service changes, were \$5M.

The YRT 2020 budget shortfall was \$12M. This amount was offset by the federal and provincial COVID-19-related funding programs.

## **6. Local Impact**

Well-planned transit services help shape and connect communities. The Region's continuing investment in public transit provides citizens with an enhanced, efficient and reliable transportation choice.

COVID-19 had a significant impact on transit in 2020 with historically low transit ridership levels. YRT will continue to respond to the effects of reduced ridership by adjusting service levels, replacing some conventional services with lower cost Mobility On-Request service and potentially discontinuing routes that have historically had low ridership.

## **7. Conclusion**

### **York Region Transit continued operating and delivering programs in 2020 despite impacts of COVID-19**

With the closure of all publicly-funded schools and non-essential businesses, transit ridership initially decreased to approximately 20% of 2019 ridership across York Region due to province-wide shutdowns.

With the gradual reopening of businesses and school resumption, local and Viva ridership increased; however, even at the highest ridership level in 2020, it was still only about 53% of

2019. Transit ridership levels in the Region were in line with the other Ontario transit systems.

The 2020 planned initiatives were delivered in addition to responding to COVID-19. There is still a lack of certainty in what the future will look like as we move into 2021, with continued area-wide shutdowns and vaccination shortages potentially impacting future system planning. Staff will continue working with all other GTHA transit agencies and the Province to provide safe and efficient transit services throughout 2021. Focusing on major corridors and connections to higher-order transit services will begin to reinstate transit network connectivity and make transit services attractive and easy to use for travellers.

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For more information on this report, please contact Ann-Marie Carroll, General Manager, York Region Transit at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75677. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

Recommended by:



**Paul Jankowski**  
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Approved for Submission:



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March 19, 2021  
Attachments (2)  
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