

The Regional Municipality of York

Committee of the Whole
Transportation Services
April 7, 2022

Report of the Commissioner of Transportation Services

York Region Transit 2021 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) 2021 system performance.

Key Points:

- In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to significantly impact transit agencies across the country, including YRT
- YRT revenue ridership increased to 9.4M in 2021 compared to 9.1M in 2020 but continued to remain low compared to 22.3M in 2019
- YRT Mobility On-Request service continued to substitute for conventional service routes during the COVID-19 pandemic to help reduce operating costs and ensure transit options were available for travellers, including those 65 and older, who rely on it to connect to the broader transit network for work, medical appointments and other essential services
- Key initiatives identified prior to the COVID-19 pandemic were delivered, including the addition of six new electric buses and completion of several asset management-related programs
- Fare and service integration continued to be a priority through collaboration with the Ministry of Transportation, Metrolinx and other Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) transit agencies in harmonizing fare-age categories, beginning the process of setting fare policy and identifying the technology needed to support fare and service integration across the GTHA, and planning for service integration that would improve the traveller experience

3. Background

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

York Region provides a blend of equitable, economical and innovative transit operations to service its large geographical area and meet the needs of all nine local, rural, suburban and urban municipalities.

A variety of YRT service types are available:

- Viva bus rapid transit
- Base routes – Operate on major arterial corridors
- Local routes – Operate in neighbourhoods
- High school specials – Provide direct service to high schools
- Express routes – Provide direct service to Subway stations
- GO Shuttles – Provide direct service to GO train stations (currently suspended)
- 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 (Paratransit) – Door-to-door, shared-ride, accessible public transit service for people with disabilities
- Transit is deemed by the provincial government as a designated essential service and therefore, continued to operate in 2021. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, travellers have been encouraged to continue to pay their fare using contactless forms of payment, including PRESTO and the YRT Pay app. Council approved a fare freeze at 2019 rates in 2021.

4. Analysis

Transit revenue ridership increased to 9.4M in 2021 compared to 9.1M in 2020 but continued to remain low compared to 22.3M in 2019

York Region Transit and other transit agencies across the country continued to experience significant ridership and revenue decreases throughout 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Revenue ridership is the number of fare-paying customers on the system.

From April through December 2021, YRT revenue ridership increased approximately 70% compared to the same period in 2020, in alignment with provincial Public Health restrictions beginning to be lifted. Service continued to be adjusted based on the provincial reopening

plan phases and aligned with increased traveller demand. A comparison of monthly system-wide revenue ridership for 2019 through 2021 is shown in Attachment 1.

Efficiencies and service effectiveness were realized through alternative service strategies and reductions in transit service and internal operational costs

Several service reductions implemented in mid-2020 to better align with traveller demand and reduce internal and external operating costs were maintained and provided further efficiencies and service effectiveness in 2021. These included suspension of 24 routes and expansion of Mobility On-Request conventional service into areas with low transit demand and substituting some conventional routes.

Viva and base routes generally returned to pre-pandemic service levels due to increased traveller demand. These routes provide connections to the Toronto Transit Commission subway and key destinations along major travel corridors. These changes were quickly implemented and communicated to travellers through collaboration between key stakeholders.

Mobility On-Request paratransit service ridership decreased 9.5% compared to 2020 and decreased 67.6% compared to 2019. The reduction was primarily due to the cancellation or ongoing suspension of day programs and other support services due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mobility On-Request conventional service has continued to operate in place of 15 local conventional bus routes during the COVID-19 pandemic to help reduce operating costs and ensure transit options remain available for travellers. In 2021, four Mobility On-Request conventional services were introduced, expanded or restructured. Mobility On-Request conventional ridership increased 31.2% compared to 2020 and increased 25.4% compared to 2019. A comparison of Mobility On-Request conventional service for 2019 through 2021 is shown on Attachment 2.

Key initiatives were delivered in 2021 with a focus on traveller experience, safety and the environment

In 2021, staff continued to support essential COVID-19 pandemic-related initiatives required to keep the YRT system operational during the pandemic while delivering programs to advance branch, department and corporate goals and strategies. Primary deliverables completed in 2021 included:

- Awarded and implemented transit operations and maintenance contract for the newly integrated West-North Transit Division, with an hourly operating rate 1.4% lower than the previous average contractor hourly operating rate
- Construction commenced on expansion of the Region's operations, maintenance and storage facility located at 55 Orlando Avenue and on the Major Mackenzie Drive West Bus Terminal
- Added six new YRT electric buses into service in support of the Transit Bus Fleet Electrification Plan that will see all YRT buses converted to zero-emission technology

by 2047; an additional two electric buses will be delivered in 2022, with electrical upgrades to support YRT bus fleet conversion in current and future bus garage expansions

- Ongoing technology improvements, including PRESTO equipment modernization and driver support systems
- 2022 Annual Transit Initiatives developed and implemented 2021 service changes approved by Council
- Continued to align service levels with ridership demand, including ongoing planning of future service initiatives
- Refurbished 48 buses to extend operational vehicle lifecycle
- Replaced 40 concrete bus stop pads, installed 71 new pads, upgraded 31 bus shelters and installed eight new shelters throughout the Region
- Ensured YRT service contractors aligned COVID-19 pandemic policies and protocols to meet Regional standards, including enhanced cleaning of fleet and facilities
- Maintained ongoing communications onboard, at terminals and stations, and through social media, local newspapers and the YRT and York Region websites to promote and educate travellers on safety requirements while using transit
- Participated in ongoing consultation and support for the Yonge North Subway Extension and associated transit-oriented communities
- Operated Ontario's first drive-through vaccination clinic in partnership with Public Health
- Extended Mobility On-Request 65+ service and offered trips to vaccination appointments for York Region seniors

A focus on fare and service integration continued throughout 2021

In [September 2020](#), Council approved the harmonization of YRT fares with other GTHA transit agencies. This change took effect June 27, 2021. The harmonization of fare age categories established a common fare structure, simplified travel, provided clarity for customers and was a first step towards fare integration.

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

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 through the Fare and Service Integration Provincial-Municipal table.

York Region Transit is planning to pilot a contactless payment and open door service in partnership with PRESTO and local transit agencies

Staff continue to work closely with PRESTO and transit agency partners to pilot contactless payment on YRT services, enabling customers to pay transit fares with credit and debit cards. This provides convenience by eliminating the need to obtain and load a physical PRESTO card.

Staff are also collaborating with the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to pilot an open-door service on the Dufferin North corridor. Pilot initiation is contingent on the TTC addressing legislative and contractual constraints to service integration under the City of Toronto Act and implementing a fare collection solution with PRESTO and participating 905 area code transit agencies operating in Toronto. Cross-boundary service integration proposes to leverage existing vehicle capacity to make more service available to customers travelling between York Region and Toronto. On [February 10, 2022](#), TTC received board approval to move forward with the pilot.

In 2022, managing COVID-19 pandemic impacts on transit ridership and revenues continues while planning for post-pandemic ridership recovery

Health and safety measures implemented to help protect staff, contractor employees and travellers from the COVID-19 virus will continue throughout 2022, including enhanced cleaning of high touch areas, deep cleaning of vehicles and requiring a COVID-19 vaccination policy for contractors and subcontractors.

Transit service levels continue to be managed based on ridership demand and within the Council-approved 2022 budget. Staff continue to develop service plans to support ridership recovery while working with GTHA transit agencies to align service delivery.

In-line with provincial reopening plans, the YRT ridership recovery strategy will continue to evaluate and implement applicable service resumptions on major corridors, such as those identified as part of the Frequent Transit Network, Express Bus Network and Viva system in York Region.

5. Financial

Agencies sought federal and provincial funding to keep transit services operating throughout 2021

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 fiscal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges municipalities are facing to maintain essential transit service operations.

In response to these efforts, a provincial Transit Enhanced Cleaning Funding Program was announced in 2020 to reimburse transit agencies for additional costs incurred for enhanced

cleaning of buses, garages, stations and terminals. The Region was allocated \$661,031 (to be used by June 30, 2021) for costs incurred in 2020.

In 2021, through Phases 2 and 3 of the joint federal-provincial *Safe Restart Agreement*, the Region was allocated approximately \$23.1M for eligible expenses to help address COVID-19 pandemic-related financial impacts. The funding from the *Safe Restart Agreement* helped increase the estimated 2021 revenue-to-cost ratio from 21% to approximately 36%. A claim of an additional \$2M top-up funding has been submitted to support further impacts from 2021. Staff continue to monitor and advocate for additional funding to address COVID-19 pandemic-related financial impacts.

The provincial government committed \$120M in one-time top-up funding to address transit system-related impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2021-22 Gas Tax program. This one-time additional funding will help stabilize 2021-22 program allocations as the province continues and transit systems begin to recover. York Region has been allocated approximately \$17M for the 2021-22 Gas Tax program.

On August 10, 2021, the federal government launched the \$2.75B Zero Emission Transit Fund to help communities invest in zero emission public transit and school transportation options, including zero emission buses and infrastructure. York Region submitted an Expression of Interest for the Zero Emission Transit Fund in November 2021 and is currently in the second stage of the application process.

Transit revenue totalled \$33M in 2021 but continued to remain low compared to 2019

In 2021, fare revenue totalled \$33M compared to \$31M in 2020 but continued to remain low compared to \$74M in 2019. Additional revenue of \$140K was received through shelter advertising. Fare revenue loss was directly impacted because of COVID-19-pandemic measures at the provincial and federal levels that included mandatory social distancing and travel only for essential trips.

Service changes to find efficiencies resulted in a savings of approximately \$22M. Total savings, other than from service changes, were \$6M.

6. Local Impact

Well-planned transit services help shape and connect communities. The Region's continuing investment in public transit provides travellers with a safe, effective and reliable transportation choice.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to significantly impact transit in 2021 with lower than pre-pandemic transit ridership levels. In response to reduced ridership, YRT service levels were adjusted, some conventional routes were replaced with more effective Mobility On-Request service and routes with historically low ridership were discontinued.

7. Conclusion

Due largely to periodic provincial lockdowns and restrictions throughout 2021, transit revenue ridership was approximately 42% of 2019 ridership. Ridership increased with the gradual reopening of businesses and publicly-funded schools. From April through December 2021, revenue ridership showed an increase of approximately 70% compared to 2020.

Several key initiatives were delivered in 2021, while services were redesigned to better respond to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure continued accessibility for those who rely on public transit as their primary mode of transportation to access work and essential services.

Staff will continue working with the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area transit agencies and the federal and provincial governments to provide safe, effective and reliable transit services throughout 2022.

For more information on this report, please contact Kyle Catney, Acting Director of Transit Operations at 1-877-464-9675 ext. 75637. Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.



Recommended by:

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Approved for Submission:

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March 18, 2022

Attachments (2)

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