

TRANSIT PLAN GETS GREEN LIGHT

Ambitious plan aims to enhance region's public transit system

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

York Region councillors have voted to support an ambitious, multi-year plan to enhance the region's public transit system.

Members of the region's transportation and works committee reviewed a document last Wednesday that recommends dedicated bus lanes and other measures, all with the view of providing commuters seamless access to Toronto's transit system.

Transportation and works commissioner Kees Schipper told politicians it is important to strike partnerships with the Toronto Transit Commission, the City of Toronto and the neighbouring regions of Durham and Peel to formulate a co-ordinated approach to transit issues that face this part of the Greater Toronto Area.

"My feeling is that it may take some time for us to consummate such a partnership," Schipper said. "And time is of the essence."



KEES SCHIPPER: Transportation, works commissioner says partnership with TTC important.



BILL O'DONNELL: Markham councillor questions feasibility of creating dedicated bus lanes on Yonge Street.

Highlights of the transit initiatives include:

- Creation of dedicated bus lanes on Yonge Street between Hwy. 7 and Finch subway station;
- Establishment of express GO bus service on Highway 404 from Newmarket to Toronto;
- Discussions with Toronto on the creation of north-south transit links with York's southern municipalities and,

- The purchase of land on Steeles Avenue for a transit terminal that would connect commuters with the TTC subway at York University.

The region will also consult with the private sector on the establishment of rapid transit service for the southern urban area comprised of Markham, Vaughan and Richmond Hill, Schipper said. York will issue a call for submis-

sions by interested parties and report back, he said.

"It could be a billion or two-billion-dollar partnership."

Committee members accepted recommendations with little comment.

But Markham Councillor Bill O'Donnell questioned the feasibility of creating dedicated bus lanes on Yonge Street, the region's busiest transit corridor.

He said the region could expect opposition if a widening of Yonge is required, especially in areas such as Thornhill, where roadway expansion would be difficult.

"I'm just not sure how we could accommodate a transitway in that narrow cross-section through Thornhill," O'Donnell said.

"We need to solve that Yonge Street corridor problem."

Schipper said staff will consider various scenarios for Yonge Street and report back to council with alternative plans of action.

Regional chairperson Bill Fisch applauded the report, adding now, with the province committed to a 10-year plan to improve transit and invest billions of dollars, it is time for the region to pursue future plans.

Transit needs grow along Hwy. 7 corridor

Regional study predicts dramatic growth in 25 years along busy southern thoroughfare

BY JEFF MITCHELL
Staff Writer

New statistics on employment and population levels in York Region's Hwy. 7 corridor prove the area warrants a light rapid transit system.

That's the opinion of regional chairperson Bill Fisch, who has vowed to use the information in talks with private sector interests looking at building urban transit systems.

"They've told us the Hwy. 7 corridor doesn't have the concentration necessary (for such a system)," Fisch said. "I think they're using old numbers."

A report submitted to the region's planning committee last Wednesday outlines a study conducted by the region at the request of Markham, which maps growth in the Hwy. 7 corridor from 1986 to the present and makes projections for 2026.

The map, which divides the corridor into eight sections from Vaughan in the west to Markham

in the east, indicates significant growth in population levels and employment opportunities between 1986 and 1998, with more to come between 1998 and 2026. It predicts in 25 years there will be roughly 325,000 people living in the corridor and nearly 300,000 jobs.

'Our task here in York Region ... is to get people out of their cars.'

— Bill Fisch
Regional chairperson

Those are encouraging numbers for Richmond Hill Regional Councillor Dave Barrow, who is among a number of municipal representatives in the south discussing bringing some mode of higher-order transit to the south end of the region.

Markham is currently investigating a light rail system for its core area; Vaughan has settled on an

extension of the Toronto Transit Commission subway line. Barrow said those projects could easily be connected to a light rail line serving all three southern municipalities.

"It appears we have a good case the Hwy. 7/407 corridor could be used," said Barrow, who has discussed density requirements with TTC representatives.

Barrow, a member of the region's transit committee, said it makes sense to consider east-west transit links in addition to the north-south routes that have been the focus for so long.

"We tend to concentrate on the north-south (routes)," he said. "We have to recognize those that are living and working in the region need a higher order of transit as well."

Fisch agrees, calling establishment of a light rapid transit system in the south "absolutely key" to the region's plans for the future.

"Our task here in York Region and the GTA is to get people out of their cars," he said.

Fisch vowed to move quickly,



DAVE BARROW: Richmond Hill councillor says east-west transit routes must also be recognized.

establishing contacts with private sector investors, as well as government decision-makers, in hopes of forming a partnership that will get the project moving.

"I want this thing up and running in five to seven years," Fisch said.

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Entertaining show

The Newmarket Theatre will be alive with action Oct. 27 for two entertainment-packed shows.

The benefit variety show, *U.S.A. Disaster Relief*, will feature singers, dancers and bands for two showtimes: 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 each and proceeds will go to help victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States.

The event is sponsored by the Town of Newmarket's parks recreation and culture department, Newmarket Theatre and The Era-Banner. Call the 24-hour ticker order hotline at (905) 953-5122.

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Business talk

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