

YRT adding green to its colours

BY SEAN PEARCE
Staff Writer

The colours most commonly associated with York Region Transit might be white and blue, but, more and more, green might be a good match, too.

Now, no one's talking about a new paint scheme for buses in York Region, but the various green initiatives the region has undertaken over the past 12 months are getting recognition.

The region has undertaken a whole host of new projects designed to make the already environmentally friendly concept of public transit even greener, YRT manager Don Gordon explained.

"By its nature, public transit is something of a green initiative," he said. "The more people we can get out of their cars and onto a bus, the better." Still, there's always room for improvement, Mr. Gordon said.

To that end, the region has

studied the use of a bio-diesel blend in its Viva fleet and, as a result, bio-diesel buses will soon be making the rounds on a street near you.

And the region has a couple of other green tricks up its sleeves that will gradually take shape in the near future, Mr. Gordon said.

YRT will purchase diesel-electric hybrid buses to test, he said.

Beyond making those blue and white buses a little greener, Mr. Gordon said a lot has been done to try to decrease the environmental impact of the numerous bus shelters that dot the arterial roads through the region.

"One of the things we've piloted is solar-powered bus shelters and that's going very well," he said.

It's the region's hope, Mr. Gordon said, that when the tender for new street furniture for bus shelters goes out, incorporating solar power along with bike racks, recycling containers and other green friendly accessories will be a priority.

The region is so serious about making transit as green as it can be, it's even working toward powering stations and other facilities using solar power or other green electrical energy sources.

Of course, what would any discussion about greener transit be without mentioning the transit provider with green vehicles — GO Transit.

Again, GO spokesperson Stephanie Sorensen said transit tends to be green by nature, as it gets more people moving with less of an eco-footprint, but she agreed there's always room for improvement.

"A big thing is we introduced our new locomotives earlier this year," she said. "They're more powerful, they can pull two more cars and they are more environmentally friendly."

Another big thing to which Ms Sorensen drew attention was GO Transit's efforts to replace some of the aging fleet with newer and more efficient vehicles.

It's hard to include roads on the green list, as smog and congestion are constant concerns, but some headway has been made as the region's highways have started to incorporate high occupancy vehicle lanes to encourage carpooling.

Many municipalities have also

started purchasing hybrid vehicles, or Smartcars for their employees and Smart Commutes in the region continue to grow in popularity.

The initiatives are moving, sometimes literally, in the right direction, environmental studies professor and director of the City Institute at York University Roger Keil said, adding the car, as a form of conveyance, just isn't feasible any longer.

"Obviously its a major issue for the Greater Toronto Area and what we need is a metropolitan solution; a bold solution," Mr. Keil said.

"The car is on its way out."

The rise of car culture represents one of the great environmental follies of the late 20th century and is rapidly becoming the compounded eco-folly of the 21st century, especially in North America, Mr. Keil said. To solve the problem, municipalities everywhere need to marry adequate transit with proper urban density so people can live, work, shop and play in the same area and, when they need to travel, their destination is only a bus or train ride away.

"It's difficult to cut through that culture, but you need to change the way people think and live," he said.

As for YRT and GO initiatives, Mr. Keil said they have the right idea.



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