

York Region Transit enhances on-demand, GO shuttle service in Aurora

By Brock Weir

Effective this week, York Region Transit (YRT) has expanded local dial-a-ride service in Aurora and Oak Ridges.

The changes, implemented Monday, impact the Route 31 ? Aurora North service.

Dial A Ride (DAR) in Aurora and Oak Ridges offers transit service at stops within a specific geographic area, along fixed routes, to rides booked at least one hour in advance of your trip.

DAR services operate weekdays between 6.30 p.m. to 10.45 p.m., and, on select routes, Saturdays from 7 a.m. to 6.45 p.m.

Additional enhancements are also in the works for shuttles serving Aurorans travelling to and from the Aurora GO Station.

According to YRT's Adrian Kawun, York Region Transit is in the third of its three-phase transit plan, with this stage now focused on rapid transit integration, which was hallmarked by the splashy roll-out of the subway's expansion into York Region's southern tier in December.

?In 2011 ? 2015, transit was in a period of adjustments, finding efficiencies across the Region by better matching service levels with traveller demand,? he said. ?The 2016 ? 2020 strategic plan was approved by Council in 2015. This five year plan focuses on GTA rapid transit integration where we will experience the opening of more rapid ways and subway extension into York Region. Staff are working with the Province and other kinds of partners towards more cross-boundary transit services and fare integration.?

By the end of 2017, Mr. Kawun said the YRT's Mobility Plus service expected to see ridership growth in the area of two per cent after Mobility Plus reallocated 400,000 km of service to VIVA and conventional transit service to expand mobility rides using existing resources.

?The 2017 Revenue to Cost ratio will meet the current 40 per cent target,? said Mr. Kawun of transit fares. ?2018 transit initiatives have been designed to be cost neutral due to planned operating efficiencies. This will enable transit to maintain the targeted 40 per cent even with the added cost pressures associated with the operations and maintenance of new VIVA stations and subway bus terminals.

?Service continues to meet or exceed on time performance targets identified in transit service standards, staff work closely with operating contractors to ensure they meet all standards set out in contracts and have proven to be good partners to the Region in providing transit services.?

In advance of the New Year, upcoming changes to the YRT, were going to be the ?most transformational? phase of the plan, he said. These transformational changes include the three new subway stations and what he anticipated at year's end to be a 44 per cent increase in On Demand use over 2016.

?In 2018, On Demand service will be enhanced in Aurora to further increase service,? said Mr. Kawun. ?On Demand service will both utilize technology and smaller vehicles [to] allow for cost efficiency. Travellers will be able to book a trip and travel within a prescribed service area between any Aurora bus stop and the Aurora GO Station. Improvements also include the introduction for an On Demand GO shuttle. Last year we did a restructure of the Aurora GO Shuttle. We actually shortened it and directed it to operate through more of the neighbourhoods in Aurora and are actually seeing an increase in ridership.?

Presenting these changes recently to Council, Mr. Kawun indicated, following a question from Councillor Paul Pirri on whether the YRT might consider following the lead of other northerly communities in using platforms like Uber to move people, that YRT is considering using ?transportation network companies? as part of their ?integrated system.?

?However, with the legislation in terms of the operation of private vehicles we are still looking to see what model best fits our system,? he said. ?We are in contact to see what can be provided to York Region residents as well as what is happening in [surrounding area]. Our on demand service could potentially fill that market gap.?