

## York Region Transit will focus on increasing ridership and revenue in 2014

**By Brock Weir**

Restructuring routes and getting more riders in seats ? those are the objectives of York Region Transit as it forges ahead into 2014.

In addition to the fare increases approved last month at Regional Council, ?realignment? is the watchword as the YRT streamlines and reconfigures local service here in Aurora.

?Our goals are to work on increasing ridership numbers and improving the revenue to cost ratio,? said Adrian Kawun of York Region Transit.

Mr. Kawun made his presentation to Aurora Council last week. In justifying transit hikes for next year, bringing the standard adult cash fare up .25 cents to \$4 per ride, Regional Councillors stressed there are limited ways to close the gap between the amount of money taxpayers subsidize transit users per ride, versus what they bring in at the cash box, but Mr. Kawun had a few ideas.

?Our 2014 plan focuses on restructuring routes for efficiencies, making travel times more appealing by reducing one way loops and creating point-to-point destinations; adjusting service levels and meeting customer demands; adjusting schedules to manage service and construction areas; and preparing for the subway and 2017 rapid transit network plan.?

Mobility Plus is also in focus for the coming year. The division of York Region Transit which focuses on providing conventional and specialized transit services for people with mobility issues, will continue to focus on ?managing ridership demand and maximizing vehicle usage.?

A primary goal is getting more Mobility Plus users onto conventional transit through their ?Family of Services? program, added Mr. Kawun. This service provides a hybrid service to people using wheelchairs, walkers, and other mobility aids. For instance, a Mobility Plus service could pick up a user at their home, drop them off at a central bus stop to take a regular, accessible bus for a long haul ride, before being picked up at another station by Mobility Plus bound for the ultimate destination.

According to Mr. Kawun, these changes, goals, and objectives stemmed from public consultation sessions held throughout York Region. In total, approximately 1,000 transit users participated in these sessions throughout the Region. A ?great success?, he said.

?A key focus is not to leave anyone behind,? said Mr. Kawun, noting changes in Aurora routes Route 31 and 32.

Route 31, which serves Yonge Street and the Aurora GO Station will now begin at Wellington Street and Haida Drive bound for the Station. The last evening trip will be reduced, ending at St. John's Sideroad and Yonge Street to account for dwindling numbers heading to the GO Station in the evening. Route 32, which serves Wellington Street, Bayview Avenue, Henderson Drive, and Bathurst Street, will have one southbound route slashed near the end of the run as it is a service currently being duplicated by Dial-A-Ride.

It will continue to be serviced by the latter program.

?[Dial a Ride] is a co-responsive service that usually operates in the lowest demand periods throughout the day,? said Mr. Kawun. ?What customers are required to do is call an 800 number half an hour before the planned trip, and an accessible Dial a Ride vehicle will come and pick the passenger up at the designated stop they're [using]. It is not a door to door service, but it is a stop to stop service.

?We're also looking at a smaller vehicle strategy in line with a GO Shuttle review, providing shuttle service directly to the GO Station. Currently 30 foot buses, which are the smaller vehicles, and 40 foot larger vehicles which operate in the Aurora area, and the reason being that some of these trips are integrated with school trips.?

Aside from school trips, however, many of these buses often whiz by with less than a handful of passengers on board, occasionally even empty. The lower the number of people on the bus, the higher each trip is subsidized by the taxpayer.

?It occurred to me [after a previous presentation] that although the subsidy for a person needing Mobility transit and its door to door services is \$40, and with all the empty buses we see trundling around our streets, that might very well be \$40 [in subsidies] for a person who isn't mobility challenged,? said Councillor Evelyn Buck. ?Maybe everybody should be getting door to door transit!?