

## Taxpayers "underserved" by Transit: Councillor

**By Brock Weir**

York Region Transit hopes to get more people on the move in 2017.

With an increased focus on Viva Transit and transit rapid ways throughout York Region, York Region Transit (YRT) says the New Year will prioritize service reliability and improving connections with GO Transit.

These priorities were outlined at Council last month by Adrian Kawun, Manager of Service Planning for the YRT. In his annual presentation to Council, Mr. Kawun outlined a number of service changes that could have an impact on Aurora.

Among these changes are the cancellation of Route 31 North, which has provided rush hour service along Industrial Parkway, in favour of converting it from a conventional service to an on-demand and dial-a-ride service, and earlier morning service on Route 22 A.

But, following his formal presentation, the focus of many local lawmakers was ensuring Aurorans have as many opportunities as possible to use the YRT as part of their GO Transit commute.

The first Councillor out of the gate was Paul Pirri, who questioned Mr. Kawun of the status of a shuttle service to get people to and from the GO Train in the morning and evening rush hour commutes. Mr. Kawun said the YRT already has a shuttle, but some changes are planned.

“We are planning to modify it a little bit more based on where we find the demand to get to the GO is coming from,” said Mr. Kawun. “We did a license plate trace at the GO Station to identify where customers of the GO Trains are actually living.”

But, for many Councillors, there was more to consider.

“One of the challenges I hear from a lot of residents taking that leap of faith and getting out of their car to take transit and use the shuttle service to get to the GO Station is a lot of times they find the shuttle actually doesn't make it on time and the train has actually left before the bus actually gets there,” said Councillor Tom Mrakas, questioning what the YRT is doing to make sure those times are met. “I think that would go a long way in reassuring a lot of residents they can get out of their car and take that service.”

Those services are scheduled to arrive between five and ten minutes before the train and if there is a situation constantly occurring, such trips will be modified to ensure connections are made, said Mr. Kawun.

“We have inspectors at the stations holding back those shuttles because we know that there is a delay so there is no sense sending out a GO Shuttle empty when you know our customers are two or three minutes away. We have a few contingency plans in place for situations where we know that the trains are delayed or a little early and on our side if there is an increase in traffic delays we will monitor that service and add time and adjust the schedules accordingly to make sure that those trains are actually met.”

Councillor Wendy Gaertner was also among those with concerns over YRT reliability, adding she has heard from individuals travelling to York University on problems they have experienced.

Questions were also raised on the correlation between dissatisfaction with some YRT services and the cost per rider. As things stand now, only about 40 per cent of the cost per rider is recovered at the fare box, meaning a large part of the service is subsidized by taxpayers. While the YRT plans to up this recovery to 45 per cent in the years ahead, there are broader issues at play, Councillors contended.

“If York Region is satisfied that they are providing that service, I think it would be useful for us to know a little more detail on what

the routes are, what the riderships are, if it is increasing and, if it is not, why waste our money?? asked Councillor John Abel. ?Why waste taxpayers' money? If the buses are sitting idle and empty, it is costing a lot of money. Why not in the smaller demographic, like Aurora, that is being serviced by GO, why not try something a little more innovative and try more of a direct line shuttle to demonstrate that it is faster and easier for the residents and you might get some buy-in.

?I feel we are being underserved by the tax dollars we're using.?