
To: York Region Rapid Transit Corporation Board of Directors

From: Mary-Frances Turner, President

Subject: YRRTC Communications – 2016 Results and 2017 Approach

Ref: YORK #7218495

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Board receives this report for information.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is:

- To provide the Board with a brief summary of vivaNext communications results for 2016 and an overview of the communications approach for 2017.

Background

A robust communication plan guides our efforts to keep property owners, communities and stakeholders informed and engaged about vivaNext projects

- Frequent, timely, practical and accurate information sharing helps manage disruption impacts and increases overall awareness and understanding of the projects.
- Proactive and personal communication approaches enables us to quickly address enquiries, needs and complaints.

- Community Liaisons work directly with community stakeholders (i.e. business owners, property owners, residents, Chambers of Commerce) to share information, address concerns and mitigate impacts as much as possible.

Tactics deployed throughout the year fall into five main divisions to meet the distinct communication needs of various audiences, and includes:

1. Regional:
 - Website (www.vivanext.com)
 - Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blog and YouTube)
 - Radio, print and on-line advertising
2. Community:
 - Project newsletters, bulletins, fact sheets and posters
 - Newspaper, billboard and transit bus ads
 - Community events and pop-up open house meetings
3. Corridor:
 - Roadside signage and billboards
 - E-mails, notices and direct mail
 - On-site events, meetings and personal contacting
4. Businesses:
 - Business Support Program
 - Roadside signage and banners
 - “We’re Open” public campaigns
5. Corporate:
 - Quarterly and Annual Reports
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Public presentations

Communication plans are implemented in consultation with Metrolinx under established protocols and procedures

- Schedule G, entitled, *Communications Protocol* to the Master Agreement, contemplates a Joint Communications Working Group and defines the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties.
- Project and communication activities are actively communicated through the Joint Communications Working Group, with updates provided to the Board through the quarterly reports.

Analysis

A significant amount of communication was issued in 2016 to ensure all stakeholders remained informed and that project information could be easily accessed, including:

- 256 construction bulletins, 16 fact sheets, 10 informational brochures and eight project newsletters;
- 199 “open for business” signs, eight special banners and eight digital message signs;
- 144 outreach events to condo boards, community groups, schools and special events in local municipalities, such as home shows, farmers’ markets and winter/summer festivals; and
- 12 videos created in-house and posted on YouTube;
- Nine print ads in local newspapers;
- Three 10-second radio ads that ran for one week each
- Social media contests to promote and support businesses and build awareness in communities reached 4,800 residents;
- Engagement on social media (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs) continues to be an effective communication tool, garnering successful results as compared to 2015, as shown in the chart below:

www.vivanext.com		
Measurement	Year End Totals	Year End Results Compared to 2015
Unique Visitors	116,232	+40%
Total Page Views	329,628	+1%
Twitter Followers	2,663	+13%
Facebook Friends	2,076	+8%
Blog Readers	16,333	+2%

- Subscriptions for construction updates and project news were as follows:

Subscribers	2016 Year End	Year End Results compared to 2015
Highway 7 – Markham	1,347	+ 2.2 %
Highway 7 – Vaughan	1,775	+ 8.8%
Davis Drive – Newmarket	1,589	- 0.2%
Yonge Street – Richmond Hill & Newmarket	4,133	+ 25%
Spadina Subway Extension	1,202	+ 9%
Yonge Subway Extension	1,939	+ 28.8%
Corporate E-Newsletters	5,963	- 2.5%

Throughout 2016, the Community Liaison team worked closely with our communities, keeping businesses and residents engaged and informed about the vivaNext projects

- Delivered approximately 9,000 construction bulletins to businesses and residents to provide advance notice regarding construction activities and potential impacts.
- Visited over 600 businesses, providing project information and other business support initiatives.
- Attended more than 50 community events, hosted three ‘pop-up’ public information centres and delivered over 40 presentations to stakeholders throughout Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket.
- Continued to increase businesses’ enrollment for complimentary membership to their local Chambers of Commerce or Board of Trade.
- Worked with the Vaughan Chamber to set up an education event on social media for businesses in the Bathurst and Centre area, and the Newmarket Chamber to provide an education event for businesses along the Yonge corridor.
- Worked closely with the Richmond Hill Board of Trade to provide them with an overview of the rapidway project, address their concerns related to the design and potential business impacts, and to update them on the funding status for the Yonge Subway Extension project.

Formal research conducted annually to measure communications performance and effectiveness continues to show positive results, despite the increased construction activity in 2016

- 75% are aware of vivaNext, and its long-term plans to construct exclusive rapidways to separate Viva from general traffic
- 74% of respondents agree that more should be done to connect public transit with neighbouring transit systems in the GTA
- Perception of the brand remained consistent within the key categories:
 - “forward thinking/visionary” (highest at 41%)
 - “transit planners & builders” (40%)
 - “transformational” (36%)
- 67% respondents said they were aware of vivaNext (aided and unaided), of which:
 - 89% support the vivaNext project
 - 79% believe it has added value to their community
 - 63% believe quality of life in the area has improved
 - 51% believe it’s an exceptional and welcoming transit system
- There were 800 respondents to the Nov. 2016 survey conducted by Forum Research, which has a 3% margin of error.

Ongoing communication tactics and approaches are proposed for deployment in 2017 to reach key audiences and maintain positive results

- Building on our successful track record to date, we will continue to focus on frequent, timely, practical and accurate information sharing.
- We will continue to mitigate local impacts as much as possible and liaising between contractors and business owners will remain a key priority.
- A celebratory tone will be used as we highlight completed projects and showcase the benefits of rapid transit network in York Region.
- Communications will be tailored and responsive to the needs of the community, business owners and property owners. A variety of tactics will be utilized, including:
 - On-street signage, billboards and message signs;
 - Personal and on-site meetings;
 - On site events and presentations to stakeholders;
 - Newsletters, bulletins, brochures and fact sheets;
 - Social media; and
 - Business Support Program campaigns.

- The opening of the Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension and SmartCentres Place Bus Terminal at the end of 2017 will be a significant milestone that we will leverage to showcase the benefits of transit planning that spans municipal borders. This will be the subject of separate reports to the Board in May and October.
- Staff will engage external services to map out broad-based communications themes and approaches to be deployed over the next five years, as the public transit landscape across the GTHA is changing and evolving.

YRRTC's corporate communications will celebrate vivaNext's achievements and increase awareness of its potential

- It is important to maintain public support for the projects through more years of construction, while building excitement around the benefits of rapid transit – and be part of the dialogue about making connections throughout the GTHA.
- Communications will support that through photography, showing the transformation and the excitement of the results, celebrating our achievements together.
- Themes will include messaging around promises made...promises kept – together.
- The communications' success will be tracked through the annual survey, which measures levels of awareness, understanding and support.

▪ ***Business Support Programs will continue in Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket with bi-annual campaigns and on-going outreach***

- *Shop 7* and *Shop Bathurst & Centre* in Vaughan, *Shop Yonge* in Richmond Hill and Newmarket, campaigns will continue with the “we’re open” message. Two campaigns per year will be deployed in June and December. The campaigns will include: print, billboards, radio advertising, bus backs, contests, digital advertising and Cineplex digital advertising.
- Staff continues to work with local Chambers to promote memberships and participation in the Business Support Program. The components of which assist the long-term development and exposure for business owners and help them bolster their marketing efforts.

Financial Implications

- As per the Capital Cost Eligibility Criteria schedule to the Master Agreement with Metrolinx, project communications related to project expenditures that are eligible for Metrolinx funding are within the \$1.755 billion envelope.

Conclusion

- Communications will continue to be coordinated and deployed to mitigate disruptions, support businesses, anticipate and alleviate the inconvenience of construction, and provide meaningful and beneficial communications to the public that provides context and maintains support for rapid transit expansion.
- Communications will celebrate our achievements and increase awareness while maintaining support for the projects, and build excitement for future investments in rapid transit.
- The Board receives the Communications update for information.

For more information on this report, please contact: Dale Albers, Chief Communications Officer, York Region Rapid Transit Corporation at 905-886-6767, ext. 71020.

Mary-Frances Turner
President

February 23, 2017