
To: York Region Rapid Transit Corporation Board of Directors
From: Mary-Frances Turner, President
Subject: Communications Update and 2015 Campaigns
Ref: YORK#5892031

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Board endorse the 2015 Communication Campaign

Purpose

The purpose of this report is:

- To provide the Board with an overview of vivaNext Communications, a summary of 2014 results and an outline of the broad-based campaigns proposed for 2015 for their endorsement.

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 mitigate disruption and increases overall awareness and understanding of the projects
- Proactive and personal communication approaches enables us to quickly address their enquiries, needs and concerns

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 and online advertising
2. Community
 - Project newsletters, bulletins, fact sheets and posters
 - Newspaper, billboard and transit shelter ads
 - Community events and open house meetings
3. Corridor:
 - Roadside signage and billboards
 - E-mails, notices and direct mail
 - On-site events, meetings and personal contacting
4. Business Support:
 - 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 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 2014 to ensure all stakeholders remained informed and that project information could be easily found, including:

- 559 construction/direction signs, 257 “open for business” signs, 43 special banners and utilized eight digital message signs throughout 2014
- 199 construction bulletins, 11 fact sheets, nine project newsletters and nine informational brochures
- 16 videos created in-house
- 13 special events in local municipalities, such as home shows, farmers’ markets and winter/summer festivals
- Four 10-second cinema pre-show ads that ran for 6 weeks and 19 print ads in local newspapers
- Five 1-hour workshops, a 3-hour workshop and a breakfast seminar was provided to help business owners develop and implement their own social media strategy
- Engagement on social media (Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs) continues to be an effective communication tool, with rising numbers of followers, shares, views and comments

Measure / Statistics	2014	
	Year End Totals	Year End Results Compared to 2013
Visitors to vivanext.com	79,568	+11%
Page views to vivanext.com	322,462	+9%
Followers on Twitter	2,054	+17%
Friends on Facebook	1,836	+13%

- Subscriptions for construction updates on the vivaNext website (www.vivanext.com) were as follows:

Subscribers	2014 Year End
Highway 7 - Markham	1,290
Highway 7 - Vaughan	1,268
Davis Drive - Newmarket	1,565
Yonge Street – Richmond Hill & Newmarket	2,800
Spadina Subway Extension	1,073
Yonge North Subway Extension	1,399
Corporate E-Newsletters	6,414

Environics survey of residents and business owners noted fairly consistent results compared to previous years, demonstrating positive results from the communications effort as construction activity increased in 2014

- 78% believe more should be done to connect transit across the GTHA
- 70% believe the vivaNext projects will have a positive impact on businesses overall
- 72% support the notion that rapid transit shapes communities and provides options on where people live and how they get around so they are not so reliant on cars
- (800 respondents; 3% margin of error; conducted in Oct./Nov. 2014)

A “making connections” theme is proposed for broad-based communications in 2015, building on our delivered projects and recent successes

- Can mean different things to different target audiences
- Not just literal service connections to get from A to B, but emotional connections to an improved quality of life and welcoming streetscape, and physical connections to the Region’s urban centres as outlined in the growth plan
- Will showcase the benefits of rapid transit in York Region
- Includes two campaigns (Spring and Fall) using print ads, light pole banners and social media
- Spring campaign will kick-off with the release of the new corporate video produced and approved in late 2014. The video highlights different aspects of “making connections” using the Highway 7 corridor and the simplicity of using Viva to help build awareness and understanding

Similar communication tactics and approaches are proposed for deployment in 2015 to reach key audiences and achieve positive results

- Communications will be tailored and responsive to the needs of the community, business owners and property owners as we utilized various tactics to engage with them, including:
 - On-street signage, billboards, message signs and bus-back ads
 - Public events and presentations to stakeholders
 - Advertising
 - Newsletters, bulletins, brochures and fact sheets
 - Social media
 - Personal and on-site meetings
 - On-site personal engagement
 - Website updates: www.vivanext.com

- Project related communications, mitigating localized impacts as much as possible and liaising between contractors and business owners will continue to be the focus of Community Liaisons

“ShopYonge” Business Support Program will be launched in both Newmarket and Richmond Hill

- *ShopYonge* will be launched in the same manner as *Shop7* and *ShopDavis*, which includes:
 - Hand delivery of information packages to each business by the Community Liaison for that segment
 - Print, billboard and radio advertising campaign in early June to remind the community that businesses are open during construction and to encourage their continued patronage

- Based on feedback received from *ShopDavis* and *Shop7* campaigns, it is anticipated that the “*we’re open*” message will also resonate for *ShopYonge* campaigns within Newmarket and Richmond Hill

- Staff are working with the local Chambers to develop the education component of the Business Support Program, which will provide long-term skill development for business owners and may help bolster their own marketing efforts
 - Chambers will conduct targeted focus groups with businesses in the community to better understand their needs

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
- The Board receive the Communications Update for information
- Following its approval from the Board, YRRTC will proceed with implementing the 2015 Communication Campaigns

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

April 16, 2015