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Durham Region Transit Report

To: Durham Region Transit Executive Committee
From: General Manager, Durham Region Transit
Report: #2023-DRT- 22
Date: October 4, 2023

Subject:

DRT Rebrand

Recommendation:

That the Transit Executive Committee recommends:

- A) That Durham Region Transit initiate a rebranding strategy, including professional services required to develop a brand strategy, standards, and designs; and
 - B) To include the required funding to develop the rebranding strategy for consideration during the 2024 DRT Business Plan and Budget process, be approved.
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Report:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to recommend to the Transit Executive Committee that staff undertake a rebranding strategy for Durham Region Transit.

2. Background

- 2.1 Public transit was regionalized in January 2006, with the formation of Durham Region Transit (DRT) - an amalgamation of the Ajax Pickering Transit Authority, Clarington Transit, Handi-Transit, Oshawa Transit Commission, and Whitby Transit. As part of this amalgamation, DRT retained the associated staff, facilities, and equipment of its predecessors. Conventional and Specialized Transit were separate and independent services within DRT.

- 2.2 In June 2013, DRT launched the Pulse bus rapid transit service along the Highway 2 corridor between the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus and downtown Oshawa. Today, the Pulse network has expanded to several frequent-service corridors, including Simcoe Street, Rossland Road, and Taunton Road. In 2022, DRT implemented a second inter-regional route, 920, operating between Scarborough Town Centre and north Oshawa Campus (Ontario Tech, Durham College).
- 2.3 In September 2020, DRT launched the enhanced On Demand service providing demand response service in low ridership zones within urban areas and rural areas across the Region.
- 2.4 In October 2021, DRT amalgamated Specialized Transit and On Demand into a single demand responsive service. Customers benefit from a unified demand responsive service model that is customer-centric, equitable and seamless.
- 2.5 In line with provincial investment in rapid transit in Durham Region, the Commission and Regional Council have made several important decisions that prioritize DRT and public transit for the Region of Durham including:
 - a. Electrification of the bus fleet by 2037.
 - b. DRT Service and Financing Strategy (2023-2032) that will evolve DRT from being last among comparator transit agencies in revenue hours of service per capita, by increasing revenue services by 125 percent over 10 years towards a convenient and reliable network that will truly influence the modal shift to transit.
 - c. Fare and service strategy, and priorities for fare and service integration to facilitate inter-regional travel.
 - d. Advancing rapid transit corridors on Highway 2 and Simcoe Street.
 - e. Greater connections into Toronto, including DRT's first connection to the rapid transit network: TTC Line 3.
 - f. Alignment and modernization of an integrated and equitable service delivery model.
 - g. Social Equity Guidelines
- 2.6 Public transit in Durham has evolved significantly since 2006, and further advancement of public transit is crucial for sustainable growth and achieving targets of climate change initiatives. DRT has transformed into a modern and innovative transit organization that continues to evolve to meet the changing travel needs of residents, while adopting emerging and sustainable technologies crucial to meeting the travel expectations of customers. The effectiveness of public transit is an important factor to the economic prosperity and quality of life for the Region and its residents.

2.7 DRT has an opportunity to renew its brand to be relevant to today's diverse and growing communities. The rebranding strategy would engage staff, customers, and residents in formulating and articulating an identity to project an image of a transit system that reflects the needs of Durham communities and stakeholders. Aligned with the Region's strategic priority of strengthening community vitality, this strategy will create a shared sense of excitement and ownership for the success of public transit across the organization and our communities.

3. Discussion

3.1 Benefits of Rebranding

A "brand" is more than a name, logo, colours and a website. It is the recognizable feeling the product or business evokes.

Rebranding DRT will provide the opportunity to engage with the community and position DRT as a modern, sustainable and inclusive regional transit service for travel within Durham, or inter-regionally across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).

a. New perception, new customers

A rebranding exercise offers the opportunity to refresh the DRT brand, further promote DRT's services, and attract individuals who may never have taken or considered public transit in the Region. It is an opportunity to change the perception of public transit from a mode of transportation for people in the lower socio-economic demographic, to a choice mode of transportation. It also provides DRT with the opportunity to understand and realign how customers interact with the transit system with an objective to make it easier. Public transit becomes successful and sustainable when residents use it regardless of their socio-economic status.

b. Culture and Talent management

Refreshing the look, feel, and perception of the DRT brand can attract and retain talent. A shared sense of excitement and ownership can have a positive effect on the organizational culture—a multiplier effect where current employees feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the organization, and prospective employees choose to join DRT.

3.2 Other than the logo, there are no guiding principles for the Durham Region Transit brand, and there is limited cohesion in DRT's brand identity.

- 3.3 To ensure DRT can meet the travel needs of customers over the next 10 to 25 years, DRT is undergoing transformational change to realign the organizational and business model for our current and future communities and employees, and adopting new and emerging zero emission technologies to mitigate impacts to the environment and climate.
- 3.4 To develop an effective branding strategy for today and the future, DRT will engage a third party to create a brand for DRT which will focus on increased recognition of DRT as an innovative and reliable public transit service provider for everyone, regardless of abilities and socio-economic status. The work will include extensive customer journey mapping from trip planning to the experience at stops and on board the transit vehicle, collecting feedback from customers and stakeholders, developing a branding strategy and standards, designing the look and feel of the brand, change management and transition planning, and the branding assets and application.
- 3.5 TEC will be engaged at key points during the project to approve various elements for the DRT brand, such as vehicle livery and logo design.
- 3.6 The branding strategy is expected to be implemented between 2025-2027, pending approval of annual business plan and budgets, to align with significant progress towards fleet electrification, enhancements to expand the transit network, new transit terminals, and opening of the new depot at 2400 Thornton Road.

3.7 Risks

Rebranding poses some risks.

a. Financial risk

- DRT will need to contract with an organization specializing in rebranding strategies. It is important that the rebranding process include a comprehensive strategy, including the brand purpose, vision and values, market analysis, how to create awareness for the target audiences, and personality for the brand. A rebranding strategy that does not achieve the desired outcomes can be a poor investment.

b. Operational risk

- Rebranding exercises take time to be successful. To create a sense of ownership, there needs to be both successful engagement and active

participation of internal staff. This can impact the workload of staff as this will be in addition to their daily operational tasks. It is important that the additional staff time is accounted for in business plans to allow active participation.

c. Image risk

- During the implementation of the rebranding strategy, there will be a transition phase where the old brand and new brand co-exist, as the branding assets are deployed on DRT's assets: buses, bus stops, buildings, website, social media, etc. This transition phase could be confusing for internal and external stakeholders. This risk can be mitigated through constant and robust communication with all stakeholders on the intention, reasoning, and status of the rebranding exercise.

4. Previous Reports and Decisions

4.1 N/A

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications related to this report.

6. Relationship to Strategic Plan

6.1 This report aligns with/addresses the following strategic goals and priorities in the Durham Region Strategic Plan:

a. Service excellence

- Goal 5.3: Demonstrate commitment to continuous quality improvement and communicating results.
- Goal 5.4: Drive organizational success through innovation, a skilled workforce, and modernized services.

7. Conclusion

7.1 DRT has evolved since 2006, with Council demonstrating its commitment to DRT and public transit with their approval of an unprecedented 10-year service and financing strategy through 2032. The transformational changes taking place within DRT creates an opportunity to rebrand and generate a shared sense of excitement and ownership across the communities served by DRT.

7.2 The rebranding strategy will engage customers, residents and staff to develop and articulate a new and exciting image of the transit system that responds to the

increasing diversity across our communities, and represents DRT as a modern, sustainable and inclusive regional transit service.

- 7.3 Upon approval of this report, staff will identify the funding required to develop the appropriate rebranding strategy for consideration during the 2024 DRT Business Plans and Budget process.

Respectfully submitted,

Original Signed by

Bill Holmes
General Manager, DRT

Recommended for Presentation to Committee

Original Signed by

Elaine C. Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer