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Transit system overhaul needed, consultant advises

By Richard Young

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Local News - The final public transit study calls for Port Hope to spend more than \$1-million between now and 2015 on improving and maintaining the public transit system.

Wally Beck of iTrans Consulting presented the final report at last night's meeting of Port Hope council.

Existing services were reviewed as part of the study.

It was determined the transit service could be utilized more often, if routes are improved and transit buses are added.

During the next year, Port Hope should work to convert the current two-route loop into a one-route service that operates in two directions, Mr. Beck said.

The plan calls for the purchase of a new conventional transit bus this year to replace an existing bus and the purchase of an additional bus in 2007. Both buses measure about 35 feet in length and should cost \$330,000 each.

By 2010 a replacement ROLLS vehicle (specialized transit for elderly and disabled) is to be purchased. This would cost about \$100,000.

An additional ROLLS vehicle is scheduled for purchase in 2010 to replace an existing vehicle, with another to be purchased in 2011.

When a second conventional transit bus is added, a second two-way route can be added, Mr. Beck said. When demand increases, users should be able to support two routes.

New bus stops should also be installed over the next decade, the report states, costing about \$5,000 each.

The study concluded that the transit link between Cobourg and Port Hope should be enhanced; Sunday service be added and evening and Saturday service be expanded; a redesign route network for local service is needed; a more co-ordinated strategy be developed with Cobourg to accommodate growing specialized transit needs.

The study also calls for an increase in bus fares, as well as special rates when multiple tickets or transit passes are purchased.

Mayor Rick Austin questioned whether service demand would increase with increased hours and buses, specifically on the weekend.

"On Saturdays a bus goes by my house quite often on Saturday and more often than not nobody is in there," he said.

Demand should increase if the service is made more convenient, Mr. Beck replied.

"It's empty because the service is not well designed," he said. "It needs improvement. The large loop is

unattractive to riders.”

Coun. Karen O'Hara expressed concern people taking the bus to Cobourg will spend their money at businesses there, rather than in Port Hope. She asked the Chamber of Commerce and downtown business owners be consulted.

No decision has been made in regard to the study. The matter will be discussed in two weeks.

The province announced in 2004 it will invest two-cents per litre of provincial gas tax for public transit. Municipalities are required to submit a 10-year asset management plan and a transit readership growth plan to the ministry of transportation to qualify for gas tax funding, according to the report. Both municipalities decided it made strategic and financial sense to conduct a joint study.

The province currently contributes 1.5 cents per litre to Port Hope for public transit, resulting in \$120,000 over the course of a year.

By October the contribution will be bumped to two cents per litre, or \$160,000 annually.

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