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Media Release

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For Immediate Release

Smart Commute receives Planning Excellence and Healthy Communities awards

Ontario Professional Planners Institute recognizes GTA commuting program

NEWMARKET – The Regional Municipality of York, along with Halton, Durham and Peel regions and the cities of Toronto, Hamilton, and Mississauga, has received special recognition awards from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI) for the Smart Commute Initiative in the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton. The OPPI chose Smart Commute to receive the Excellence in Planning Award and the first-ever Healthy Communities Award.

“These awards showcase Smart Commute’s success in aggressively encouraging carpooling, the use of public transit and alternative modes of travel such as walking and cycling to work,” said York Region Chairman and CEO Bill Fisch. “Smart Commute takes cars off our roads, reduces car emissions, improves air quality and encourages active and healthy lifestyles.”

Smart Commute is a GTA and Hamilton initiative that encourages carpooling, transit, cycling, walking and telework for employees of local workplaces and post-secondary institutions.

Through media campaigns, brochures, public events and the Carpool Zone, an online system for matching potential carpooling participants, Smart Commute’s coalition of regions and cities has helped to remove 10,000 cars from our roads each day and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 17,000 tonnes since the inception of the program in 2004. The program is now underway in other Ontario municipalities as well.

“The Smart Commute Initiative is another example of the leading practices that are being pursued in the Greater Toronto Area to cope with the immense growth that is anticipated over the next 30 years,” said OPPI President Wayne Caldwell, MCIP, RPP. “We are pleased to recognize this project for its vision, impact and commitment to actions that lead to environmental enhancement.”

The Excellence in Planning Awards recognize innovation, creativity, professionalism, problem-solving and communications in four categories: urban and community design, planning studies or reports, research/new directions and public education. This year’s winners were chosen from approximately 30 entries.

Smart Commute is also the inaugural recipient of the Healthy Communities Award. Established jointly by OPPI and the Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the award was created to recognize excellence in creating healthy communities. Smart Commute exemplifies the importance of active transportation in healthy communities.

“We are pleased to work in partnership with OPPI to create this award,” said Rocco Rossi, CEO of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. “As more awards are handed out in the ensuing years, we will help to make Ontario an even healthier province.”

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With a one-third matching grant from Transport Canada, the Smart Commute Initiative was formed by the cities and regions of the Greater Toronto Area and Hamilton in 2004. By 2008, the program included nine local Smart Commute organizations from Hamilton to Durham and became an official service of Metrolinx.

Across the GTA, more than 75 employers with almost 200,000 employees have signed on to the Smart Commute program. Notable participants include the Canadian Automobile Association, the City of Vaughan, Enbridge Gas Distribution, Hamilton Health Sciences, Hatch, IBM, ING Direct, Maple Lodge Farms, Messier-Dowty, Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, the Towns of Markham, Richmond Hill and Newmarket and York University.

The Regional Municipality of York also participates as an employer. Smart Commute York Region encourages employees to reduce commuting through carpooling, biking, walking, using public transit and participating in alternative work programs such as flex time and compressed work week programs.

The awards ceremony will take place on the evening of Thursday, September 18, 2008 at Clarion Pinewood Park Resort in North Bay. The ceremony is part of OPPI's 2008 symposium.

OPPI is the recognized voice of Ontario's planning profession. Its more than 3,000 members work in government, private practice, universities and non-profit agencies in the fields of urban and rural development, urban design, environmental planning, transportation, health and social services, heritage conservation, housing and economic development.

For further information, including OPPI's position paper on Healthy Communities, please go to:
www.ontarioplanners.on.ca

For more information on Smart Commute, please visit www.smartcommute.ca and the Carpool Zone at www.carpoolzone.smartcommute.ca/en/my/

For more information on The Regional Municipality of York, please visit www.york.ca

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