The initial results are in: with the west segment of the Highway 7 East rapidway in service for over half a year, the rapidways are already offering commuters a faster, more convenient way to get from A to B. Average travel time has dropped by over 30% during the peak periods. And more and more riders are seeing the benefits of leaving the keys at home and getting on board, with overall ridership up 38% since its original launch in 2005.

VivaNext’s success has been recognized by others as well: earlier this year it was awarded Project of the Year by the Ontario Public Works Association, for a transportation project valued greater than $50 million. We’re proud of how vivaNext has been recognized by transit and infrastructure professionals for our excellence and innovation. Read more about the awards vivaNext has been honoured with, on the back page.

Of course, the momentum is only just getting underway, with more rapidway projects in progress. The eastern segment of the Highway 7 East rapidway is scheduled to be ready for service opening later this year, allowing riders to bypass congestion all the way from Bayview Avenue in the west, to Warden Avenue in the east.

Preliminary construction is continuing on the Highway 7 West rapidway, with ongoing coordination between our project and the extension of the Toronto-York Spadina Subway up to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre at Jane Street and Highway 7.

Roadway widening and station construction is going to be underway this year along Davis Drive in Newmarket, leading to the transformation of this very congested stretch of road.

Beyond the active construction projects taking place across the Region, vivaNext is also ramping up work on additional projects that will form key parts of our future system. Rapidway segments extending north on Yonge Street from the Richmond Hill Centre into Newmarket are in the planning and procurement stages, with more to be announced this year. York Region’s vision of a connected system of rapid transit is becoming a reality!
Population increase is happening across York Region, bringing many advantages. More people means the Region can attract and support new choices in housing, employment, shopping, entertainment, dining and recreation. And that means jobs, economic stimulus and thriving communities.

York Region has developed a strategy, in collaboration with both the Province of Ontario and the local municipalities, to channel much of that growth into newly developed communities clustered in urban centres along Highway 7 and in Newmarket. This “Centres and Corridors” strategy will protect existing neighbourhoods, along with the way of life that attracts many people to the Region in the first place.

The new communities in the urban centres will be mixed-use, meaning they’ll offer residential, employment and recreational options. Once these new downtowns are fully established, people can work, live and play without needing to get in a car.

Linking these urban centres will be major transportation corridors along Highway 7, Yonge Street and Davis Drive, featuring rapid transit, sidewalks, wide boulevards, updated utilities and more. With convenient access between these new urban neighbourhoods and an expanding rapid transit network, people can travel across York Region and into the rest of The Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) without needing a car, making the centres an attractive option for people who want an urban lifestyle within York Region.

The new Regional downtowns won’t be built overnight but with new developments being built all along the corridors, transformation is well underway. Increasingly these new urban hubs will offer walkable, bike-friendly and people-centred neighbourhoods that will be welcoming to people at all stages of life, from young professionals to empty-nesters.
Whether from a plane, from the ground or underground on the subway, it’s easy to see that Yonge Street is one of the main arteries in the GTHA – as it has been for generations. Yonge Street is the spine in the GTHA’s overall transportation network, with the Yonge Subway acting as the primary conduit for transit users moving into and out of the Toronto Transit System.

To the north at Richmond Hill, we are building the rapidway system that will extend across the Region, providing connections east, west and north.

To the south is the Yonge Subway’s Finch terminus. And in between is the heavily congested Yonge Street roadway.

Linking these two rapid transit systems is a ready-to-be-built project: the Yonge Subway Extension, which would play a key role in advancing transportation – both road and transit – across the GTHA.

The planned Yonge Subway Extension will extend 6.8 kilometres north from Finch Station, with up to six stations. Its terminus at the Richmond Hill/Langstaff Urban Growth Centre will be a major transit hub where transit riders will be able to make seamless and convenient connections to GO Trains, GO Buses, TTC Subway, YRT/Viva buses, the future 407 Transitway and other transit services.

With the environmental assessment approved, the conceptual design study completed and its identification as a priority project by Metrolinx in their next wave of funding projects, this project is only waiting for capital funding before shovels can go in the ground.

Dealing with existing congestion on the Yonge Subway is already being addressed, with measures currently being put in place to increase capacity by 60%, including:

- Automatic train control [adds 36% capacity];
- New signals [adds 10% capacity];
- Six-car trains [Rocket Trains] [adds 10% capacity]; and
- Toronto-York Spadina Subway Extension [adds 8% capacity].

Work is now underway, including Metrolinx, TTC and the City of Toronto to develop a Regional Relief Strategy to improve transit service along the Yonge corridor. All options are being explored including service improvements, fare and network integration and new rapid transit projects. Future land-use, development and other considerations will all be taken into account as recommendations are put forward.

To understand why the Yonge Subway Extension to Highway 7 is such a top priority, see the article “The Missing Link” at vivaNext.com.
One of the benefits of designing a major infrastructure project like vivaNext is the opportunity it provides to enhance our natural environment wherever possible. Of course, at its most basic level, vivaNext is going to benefit the environment by helping to reduce the reliance on cars and provide options for how people get around. In addition to the new rapid transit system, the urban transformation that vivaNext is helping to shape will result in more walkable, people-friendly neighbourhoods that will encourage pedestrians and cyclists.

Through the Environmental Assessment phase of the project, detailed analyses of options and mitigation strategies for construction and design were considered and committed to. An ongoing process of reporting back on our progress is underway until the project’s completion.

On all segments, we work closely with local conservation authorities who approve our final design before providing permission to work. We also use various construction strategies to mitigate any potential impacts while we’re working, such as installing cofferdams from sheet piles or sand bags around our work zones within watercourses.

Our goal is, at a minimum, to avoid any harmful impacts [and ideally to actively enhance the natural environment] during construction and once we’re in operation.

Core values for vivaNext include a focus on excellence and innovation. It’s gratifying to have our commitment to excellence recognized by the industry, through the awarding of multiple, prestigious honours over the last several years.

The two most recent awards were received this winter, adding to previous awards that celebrate the planning, design and innovation.

The Ontario Public Works Association chose vivaNext as their Project of the Year, an honour granted to an organization that promotes excellence in the management and administration of public works projects by recognizing the coordination between the managing agency, the consultant, architect, engineer and the contractor.

Also, the York Region Chapter of the Professional Engineers of Ontario chose vivaNext as Engineering Project of the Year.

VivaNext’s commitment to excellence, innovation and accountability will continue to shape how we work, and the legacy we leave for the future.