
Submission to: **Greater Wellington Regional Council**

Topic: **Draft Wellington Regional Public
Transport Plan**

From: **Wellington City Council**

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1. Executive Summary

Public transport patronage in the Wellington region is at best flat and there are a number of factors that have contributed to this. Wellington City Council (WCC) therefore endorses Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) focus on growing public transport patronage and notes that there are a number of potential interventions that can be utilised to retain and hopefully grow patronage.

The levels at which public transport fares are set is one of those interventions. Accordingly, WCC fully supports GWRC's review of the fare box recovery policy target to achieve alignment with the national average of 50% set by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA), down from its current 52%. Because affordability is a key factor for commuters when choosing which mode of transport they use, WCC therefore requests that this work be given a high priority.

Council also supports the move towards integrated ticketing so that cost is based on end to end journeys rather than individual trips and mode discrimination. We are, however, concerned about its implementation being delayed. Integrated ticketing is another important mechanism which will encourage commuters to view public transport as a viable and preferred mode for travel and this work should be prioritised.

WCC has taken a very close interest in the decisions being taken on the type of vehicle motive power that will be used for public transport in the future. In deciding on which option to use, WCC fully supports GWRC's position that whichever bus fleet option is chosen "a low emission vehicle will be essential". The type of vehicle chosen is important for the long term sustainability of Wellington's public transport system. Getting it right will require extensive research and analysis which WCC does not believe the current timetable allows sufficient time for. In Council's view the proposal to finalise decisions on the bus fleet in order to meet the first bus tender round is overly ambitious and should be reconsidered, along with the priority this work has been given.

WCC also believes GWRC's conclusion that the trolley buses should no longer form part of the city's bus network is premature. Decisions made now will have a profound impact not only on the performance of the city's bus fleet, but also the look and feel of the city. The Council therefore requests that GWRC delay decisions on the bus fleet, including the trolley buses, pending more in-depth analysis of the options and associated costs.

WCC agrees with the implementation of Rail Scenario 1 but is concerned at the current cross-subsidisation between trains and buses. GWRC's data shows that fare box recovery rates are higher for bus than train (58% vs 54%) and that the fare per km travelled is generally higher for buses. Rail is an important feature of the region's public transport network but with the majority of trips being by bus it seems only reasonable that bus fares should be comparable with trains.

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WCC looks forward to working closely with GWRC on all these matters to achieve a reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive public transport system for the Wellington region.

2. Improving Public Transport

WCC wishes to see the alarming current trend of low growth in public transport patronage reversed. The benefits of a high quality public transport system are well documented in the draft Wellington Public Transport Plan (draft PT Plan) and the Council endorses GWRC's stated intention to grow public transport patronage.

WCC does not, however, support GWRC's focus on growing patronage at peak. Council believes patronage should be addressed across the board and to that end supports GWRC's overall proposal to offer off peak discounts, although not at the proposed rate of 25%. Rather, Council sees more value in investing the estimated \$12 million to offer a 50% off peak discount for a 10% increase in patronage. If this is not adopted, due consideration should be given to providing concessionary fares for tertiary students (who continue to pay full fares in Wellington unlike students in Auckland for example).

The Council has read with interest the improvements to the bus network that are anticipated from the proposed changes to the network. In the main we support the proposed changes if these will better meet the needs of our residents. We make some comments about specific routes later in our submission.

3. Implementing the PT Spine

It is important that implementation of the PT Spine is coordinated with all other planned public transport improvements. In particular there is a very real need for GWRC to coordinate its work on bus fleet options with consideration of high capacity buses.

WCC will be working with GWRC and NZTA as part of the joint project group to ensure this work is fully aligned.

4. Bus Fleet Options

WCC understands the desire for relative speed around bus fleet choice to meet the requirements of the bus tender process. Council is highly conscious, however, that Wellington has a once in a generation opportunity to decide on motive power and, that once a decision is made the city is locked in for the foreseeable future. Fortunately we have a wide range of viable choices available as alternatives to diesel technology rapidly evolve. This provides the city with an exciting opportunity to trial some of the new technology, for example supplementary batteries on trolley buses, before committing to a single option. The procurement process would allow for trials and for the scope to be defined during the Expression of Interest phase.

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It is also important that decisions on the overall fleet adequately meet the city's need for high capacity buses as part of implementing the PT Spine. This work needs to be done in parallel to ensure that decisions on the overall fleet do not limit the options available for high capacity buses.

The third component of the analysis is consideration of the future of the trolley buses. Again this is a once in a lifetime decision – if it is decided to no longer operate the trolley buses this option is lost for ever. WCC does not have full confidence in the assessment that GWRC has made about the trolley buses and strongly requests that more analysis be carried out into the pros and cons, including a comprehensive assessment of the full costs and benefits. Such assessment should consider the merits or otherwise of extensions to the existing trolley bus network. The Council is well aware that Wellington city residents hold a range of views about the trolley buses and will expect that all relevant issues are considered.

We also note that the overhead trolley bus poles have a dual purpose and are used by Citylink for the provision of UFB. Any assessment of the trolley bus system needs to factor in the implications of dismantling the overhead infrastructure for other users.

Finally, although it is important, vehicle choice should not take precedence over bus network issues, fare levels and integrated ticketing.

5. Bus Network

WCC supports the basic tenor of the proposed network changes if it will result in a more efficient public transport system that is reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive. It is anticipated that significant savings will result from cost efficiencies which could be applied as fare subsidies to increase patronage.

Some of our residents have raised concerns with the Council about specific routes, including in Khandallah and the number 18 bus route to Victoria University. We also understand that some of the proposed changes to bus routes will mean that some eastern suburbs commuters will need to take two buses to travel to the hospital. This is not ideal, particularly for older residents, families with young children and people with disabilities.

The issues that have been raised with WCC indicate that more consultation is required with affected communities to ensure that their needs are being addressed.

It is also important to ensure that the needs of children are being adequately met. We note that the proposed fare increase, scheduled to take effect from

1 November 2014, would mean a child's fare for zone one would be more expensive than an adult fare in Auckland. Introducing children to public transport at an early age and ensuring they have a positive experience is likely to mean they will continue to use public transport throughout their life.

6. Rail

WCC agrees with the implementation of Rail Scenario 1 but is concerned at the current cross-subsidy resulting in a price differential between trains and buses. GWRC's data shows that fare box recovery rates are higher for bus than train (58% versus 54%) and that the fare per km travelled is generally higher for buses.

Rail is an important feature of the region's public transport network but there is a question about whether there is too great a focus on rail, which has seen significant investment in recent years, given that bus travel accounts for a greater number of public transport trips. WCC seeks fairer bus fares, comparable with the levels at which train fares are set, as part of the fare structure review.

WCC would like to see more investment in park and ride facilities in areas such as the Tawa valley to make it a more viable option for people to use public transport. The lack of parking infrastructure at stations, and the high fare structure versus the relatively similar cost of parking in the city means many people choose to drive rather than use public transport.

7. Fare Structure Review and Integrated Ticketing

GWRC notes in the draft PT Plan that there are a range of reasons for the low growth in patronage over the last five years including low population growth and a period of unreliable rail services during major track work. GWRC does not, however, address the fact that recent fare increases have been followed by a drop in patronage levels illustrating the very clear correlation between the two.

WCC accordingly supports the review of the fare box recovery policy target to align with the national average of 50% set by NZTA. Given that affordability is a key factor for commuters when choosing which mode of transport they use, WCC requests that this work be given a high priority.

The Council also endorses the drive for efficiencies in the network and believes that efficiency gains, and the application of the subsequent cost savings as fare subsidies, are an effective tool to reduce fares. In our view, increasing fares requires little effort and is an 'easy' option which should only be used as a last resort, once all other options are exhausted. On this basis WCC does not support the proposed fare increase scheduled to take effect from 1 November 2014.

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WCC believes the fare structure review needs to address the current inequities between bus and train fare levels. WCC has a particular interest in zones one – three because this is the distance where the car can compete successfully with public transport. WCC wishes to see a ‘fair deal on fares’ and a more equitable approach in relation to the issue of cost per km travelled to address the current situation where a person travelling from Island Bay into the CBD pays the same as someone travelling to the CBD from Waterloo station.

WCC supports GWRC’s overall proposal to offer off peak discounts, although we do not support this being set at 25%. Council sees value in investing the estimated \$12 million to offer a 50% off peak discount for a 10% increase in patronage. If this is not adopted, due consideration needs to be given to providing concessionary fares to tertiary students (who continue to pay full fares in Wellington unlike students in Auckland for example). We also support the concept of a single fare per day as a way of simplifying the fare system for commuters.

WCC supports the move towards integrated ticketing for public transport, so that cost is based on end to end journeys rather than individual trips and mode discrimination. Council is concerned, however, about the proposed three – five year timetable and the associated delay in implementation. We note, for example, that it is currently possible to transfer between buses in the Hutt, without additional charges and assume that GWRC is funding this trial. The Council looks to GWRC to extend this service to other parts of the region within a much shorter timeframe.

Council understands that the current service provider of smart travel cards for the Wellington region, Snapper Services Ltd, believes they are in a position to develop an integrated ticketing system for the region now. WCC encourages GWRC to work with NZTA to determine how it might be possible to build on the smart card infrastructure currently available in Wellington in a way that meets NZTA’s standards requirements.

The most recent example of the implementation of an integrated ticketing system is in Auckland. We understand that the costs of development were significant and it will be important to establish what development costs have been estimated for the Wellington region and how this compares with the expected benefits of integrated ticketing to ensure the region receives value for money. It would be counter-productive if the price tag for electronic ticketing and transferability between services came at a cost of significant fare increases.

It remains, however, another important mechanism which will encourage commuters to view public transport as a viable and preferred mode for travel and this work should take greater priority.

8. Traffic Demand Management

Traffic Demand Management (TDM) when applied using best practice can lead to greater efficiencies and better utilisation of the public transport system. For example using TDM can shift public transport patronage away from the peak to the shoulder resulting in a number of benefits for the network. WCC supports the use of TDM to help achieve the objectives of the PT Plan where appropriate.

Other options considered by WCC include congestion charging and parking levies on privately owned public parking facilities. The Council acknowledges that these tools are not currently available to local government but suggests that further work be done to explore both measures in consultation with central government.

9. Conclusion

WCC endorses GWRC's focus on growing public transport patronage and the review of its fare box recovery policy target to achieve alignment with the national average of 50% set by NZTA. Because affordability is a key factor for commuters when choosing which mode of transport they use, WCC requests that this work be given a high priority.

Council also supports the move towards integrated ticketing and is concerned about the delays in its implementation. Integrated ticketing is an important mechanism that will encourage commuters to view public transport as a viable and preferred mode for travel and this work should be prioritised.

Decisions on the type of vehicle motive power that will be used for the city's bus fleet will determine the future look, feel and sustainability of the region's public transport network. WCC fully supports GWRC's position that whichever bus fleet option is chosen "a low emission vehicle will be essential" and on that basis believes it is premature to conclude that the trolley buses should no longer form part of the city's bus network. Getting the decision right will require extensive research and analysis and in Council's view the proposal to finalise decisions on the bus fleet in order to meet the first bus tender round is overly ambitious. The Council therefore requests that GWRC delay decisions on the bus fleet, including the trolley buses, pending more in-depth analysis of the options and associated costs.

WCC agrees with the implementation of Rail Scenario 1 but is concerned at the current cross-subsidisation between trains and buses. Rail is an important feature of the region's PT network but with the majority of trips being by bus it seems only reasonable that bus fares should be comparable with trains.

A high quality public transport system is a key component of a successful city and it is vital that the decisions made as part of the PT Plan are based on good quality data and analysis. WCC is a partner with GWRC, the councils in the Wellington region and NZTA in determining the future look, feel and sustainability of the region's public transport network. We look forward to

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working closely with GWRC and our other partners to achieve an efficient, reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive public transport system for the Wellington region.

This submission is signed under delegated authority by:

Signed:

Signed:

Date:

Date:

Councillor Andy Foster
*Chair, Transport & Urban
Development Committee*

Dr Kevin Lavery
Chief Executive Officer