On the Public Transport Spine Study

Submission of the Wellington City Youth Council to Greater Wellington Regional Council

The Wellington City Youth Council would also like to make an oral submission. Please contact Jack Marshall, Chair of Wellington City Youth Council on 0211866186 or jackmarshallnz@gmail.com to confirm details.

About the Wellington City Youth Council:
The Wellington City Youth Council is an advisory body to the Wellington City Council, meeting fortnightly to discuss youth-related issues and projects in the city.

The Youth Council represents members of Wellington City youth between the ages of 12 and 24, providing young perspectives on Wellington City Council proposals and draft strategies, as well as encouraging young people to engage in local governance.
Executive Summary

[1] The Youth Council supports the option which is best supported by credible evidence, regardless of what mode that is. However, we are not yet convinced that sufficient evidence exists to make an informed decision. This submission outlines our concerns.

[2] We are disappointed with the overall treatment of the light rail option. Many assumptions were made by AECOM that systematically undermine the economic viability of the light rail option. As a result, we believe the cost-benefit analysis is flawed and does not adequately represent the choice available.

[3] Significant concerns about the accuracy of the stated costs, especially about the cost of a second tunnel, have been raised in public. Whilst the Youth Council does not have the expertise to assess the costings itself, it believes GWRC should commission a second expert to assess the validity of the concerns and produce new costings if necessary.

General Points

[4] The Youth Council does not believe that time savings are particularly important. Instead, the most important factors in ensuring public transport success are frequency, reliability, and ticket prices.

[5] We question the rationale that prioritises time-saving, because it ignores the relationship between time-saving and reliability. We do not believe saved time is of any use when consumers do not know what time their bus will arrive in the first place. We further believe that the great uncertainty around public transport punctuality is a major deterrent to patronage.

[6] There is a current equilibrium in transport which sees many people choosing to drive rather than catch the bus or train. Maintaining “balanced growth” in transport will not alter that equilibrium as consumers will, later on, still have relatively similar conditions in which to make their decisions. Therefore, the proposed balanced approach will not change behaviour. That is to say: if it remains more reliable to drive than catch public transport, which is entailed
by a balanced-growth agenda, then the stated goal of increasing *public transport patronage mode-share will not be met*. Consequently, it appears the report has contradictory aims.

[7] Further to the above clause, we agree that increased parking needs to be managed in order to improve public transport mode-share. As in Auckland, increased parking results in subsidies for private commuters; it is wasted land that may otherwise be productive, but instead makes it easier to drive.

**Climate Issues**

[8] We would like to know why climate costs were not considered in the cost-benefit analysis. This oversight concerns us deeply.

[9] Twenty percent of New Zealand’s carbon footprint comes from transport. The absence of any consideration for the environmental aspects of petrol/diesel buses, as compared to other forms of transport energy, is saddening. By using electrical transport New Zealand can make significant in-roads into its pollution habits.

[10] Even if central government will not commit to environmental targets, Wellington can; and, the Youth Council firmly believes we should. Regardless of whether that occurs, transport remains an environmental priority.

[11] The costs of proper environmental protection and the fact of environmental degradation are both well-researched, if young, areas of science. Near consensus exists amongst the scientific community. Therefore, the Youth Council does not believe it needs to explain the situation further.

**Light Rail**

[12] The Youth Council was previously under the impression that light rail was intended from Johnsonville to the Airport, via Constable Street. Whilst we recognise the added cost with such an extended route, it is inevitable that the economic calculus would be significantly, and we believe negatively, altered by following the current proposed route.

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Whilst we accept the need for another tunnel if light rail went through Mt Victoria, we do not believe that route necessarily best serves Wellington transport interests. Further, we wonder whether the $300 million cost is a correct estimation, as we understand it has been challenged in the public debate.

By following a short route, from the station through to Newtown, the number of transfers required would be significantly increased. A longer, continuous route decreases the number of transfers and makes light rail more attractive. We think that the shorter route decreases likely patronage and therefore negatively affects the benefit-cost ratio. Thus, a shorter route systemically disadvantages light rail. We query the reasons for this, as the public submission document is unclear.

We also note that there is no point in building a “Spine” that only goes for a fraction of the necessary distance.

Any second opinion into light rail costs should additionally consider these above points.

**Funding the Public Transport Spine**

Young people pay rates through rent, or live at home with parents who pay rates. Therefore young people have an interest in how the Spine is funded.

We believe that costs associated with the Spine project should be spread as widely as possible; that is, whilst we recognise there may need to be an increase in fares this should be kept to a minimum to ensure that public transport remains accessible.

We support increased parking charges. We believe that congestion charges and petrol taxes should be considered. We recognise that some of these methods require support from central government. Nonetheless, all options will impact private users of cars and make driving less attractive, consequently helping to increase patronage of public transport.

Because effective public transport benefits the public, rates increases are a perfectly legitimate method of funding development.

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2 See, for example, the London Congestion Charge Zone.
[21] For the avoidance of doubt as to the above clause, a congestion-free CBD with effective public transport, benefits the public by increasing transport efficiency. All else equal, increased transport efficiency also improves economic performance. Further, alternatives to public transport encourage urban sprawl and have hidden associated costs, such as extending telecommunications infrastructure or sewerage. Finally, there are issues of social equity arising from car reliance, and environmental concerns.

[22] Those property owners whose land values increase as a result of this development should pay a targeted rate in acknowledgement of the added benefits they receive. It is not unfair to tax the private gain that results from public expenditure. We believe this is a reasonable way of spreading costs.

[23] In deciding how to fund the Spine project, regard should be given to questions of transport policy. If we wish to see an increase in public transport mode-share, this will require making private transport relatively less attractive. The alternative would mean consumers are unlikely to change their behaviour.

**Brochure Questions**

[24] As stated in the Executive Summary, we support the mode of transport that is supported by credible evidence. At this stage, we are unconvinced that it is Bus Rapid Transit.

[25] We strongly agree that “the loss of some on-street parking in exchange for faster, more reliable transport is an acceptable trade-off.” Removing car-parking typically incentivises commuters to leave cars at home, increasing public transport patronage. Further, car-parks when out of use are wasted city space, causing city sprawl. Consequently, discouraging use of cars in the CBD will decrease congestion, improve public transport, and encourage sustainable consumer practices.

[26] We strongly agree that “restricting access for general vehicles to parts of Lambton Quay and Willis Street during business hours... is an acceptable trade-off.” Wellington's transport system is designed around corridors. It is not onerous to encourage private vehicles to use The Terrace, Featherston Street or Jervois Quay instead of the most congested areas of the public
transport spine. It is a simple matter of segregating public and private transport into their respective corridors. We wonder why more steps have not already been taken to this effect.

[27] We strongly agree that “using an alternative route for some peak bus services through the CBD... is an acceptable trade-off.” The most important things in public transport operations are reliability and predictability, as we have discussed above. We can improve these factors by reducing congestion, including by using alternative routes. That said, it is best to prevent major routes from being relegated to alternative routes.

[28] The question of funding has been discussed above.

Conclusion

[29] The Youth Council is pleased that there is significant interest around Wellington's transport infrastructure. It is a necessary debate to have for revitalising our urban design.

[30] It goes without saying that smart transport choices are of fundamental importance to Wellington's on-going urban design process. Without the ability to get from different parts of the city easily, we are no different from other sprawled and congested cities worldwide. It is our compact nature that helps make us what we are.

[31] We are dissatisfied with AECOM's process for evaluating the light rail option. We do not think it reflects previous public discourse on the issue, and therefore question its evidential reliability.

[32] Accordingly, the Youth Council requests that GWRC request a second expert opinion on the viability of the light rail option that takes into account a more practicable and widely expected model. This is, as stated, in order to make clear to the public what costs and options are involved.