

Submission from Wellington City Council – Proposed Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2011-21

Submission to: **Greater Wellington Regional Council**

Plan: **Proposed Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2011-21**

From: **Wellington City Council**

Date: **4 August 2011**

1. Introduction

Wellington City Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2011-21 (PT Plan), and has prepared this submission with input from the Council's Accessibility Action Group and the Youth Council.

The Council would like to be heard in support of this submission.

2. General Comments

Wellington City Council recognises the contribution of public transport to:

- economic growth and productivity - easing road congestion, facilitating access to markets and employment, making more efficient use of existing networks and infrastructure, and facilitating productive land uses
- achieving social benefits, including providing access to basic community activities and services (work, education, healthcare, etc), and providing access to transport to those without the ability to travel by private means
- achieving environmental benefits, including reduced energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

A high-functioning public transport network is an essential element of Wellington's future as a smart green city, and Wellington City Council supports the Regional Land Transport Strategy targets of increasing both peak and off-peak passenger trips. Achieving those targets will require an increase in annual passenger trips from 36 million in 2009/10 to at least 50 million trips in 2020, a target made even more challenging by the fact the region's annual public transport patronage in 2009/10 was hardly higher than the patronage in 2005/06.

The Council supports the objectives of the PT Plan to provide simple, easy to understand services that go where people want to go, with an integrated network of services that makes interchange between and within modes easy. To achieve these objectives, while providing a high quality, reliable system with improved accessibility and environmental outcomes, there will need to be major changes in how public transport services are delivered. To achieve this, Council supports:

- Introducing a layered approach to network services, with a service hierarchy, standardised service levels, and a focus on providing high frequency high capacity services at the core of the public transport network.
- Carrying out a rolling programme of area-wide service reviews, including completing the Wellington City Bus Review, and undertaking the Wellington Public Transport Spine Study.
- Adopting vehicle quality standards, addressing issues including emissions and accessibility.
- Introducing commercial arrangements for public transport operators that provide value for money.

In addition, the Council has concerns about the details proposed in some areas of the PT Plan, and whether some of these high level objectives and targets will be achieved. These concerns are set out below.

3. Layered Service Approach

The introduction of a layered service approach with frequent high capacity services on the rapid and quality transit networks provides the opportunity to significantly improve the public transport system in Wellington, as it has in other cities where it has been implemented. For this approach to work effectively it is imperative that the roles of the different layers of the network are clearly defined with appropriate services levels. The classification and service levels will set the funding priorities, so it is important they are correct.

At this point however, the details of the approach do not appear to have been fully worked through. For example, the routes from the Wellington CBD through the Golden Mile to the Wellington Regional Hospital and Wellington International Airport are defined as part of the rapid transit network. As part of this network, the operating characteristics, infrastructure requirements and service levels in the PT Plan would require public transport services on these routes to operate on a fully separate right of way, with services every 6 minutes at peak and every 10 minutes off-peak.

The Council does not believe that a fully separate right of way is feasible for these complete routes, or that there is sufficient demand to justify this level of service. It is recommended that these routes south of the Wellington Railway Station are re-categorised as part of the quality transit network, and reassessed after the completion of the Wellington Public Transit Spine Study.

Many of the main Wellington bus routes are identified as being part of the quality transit network. The infrastructure and service levels are described as operating on a shared right of way but with extensive priority including bus lanes and signal priority in congested areas, and with services every 15 or 20 minutes at peak and every 30 minutes off-peak. However, a service level of two buses per hour off-peak is too low to allow the quality transit network to fulfil the function of 'connecting the region's activity centres and growth nodes and to facilitate relatively fast reliable access around the region'¹. Many services between these centres already operate at frequencies of 15 minutes or better all day. This means that, according to the priorities listed in the PT Plan, they are unlikely to receive additional services,² irrespective of demand.

It is recommended that service levels for the quality transit network are increased, including increasing the standard off-peak frequency to 15 minutes, and that the public transport funding priorities recognise that standard service levels may be insufficient to meet demand.

In addition, Council supports additional service level information for the different networks being included in the PT Plan, including guidelines for service reliability and punctuality, both critical factors for growing patronage.

4. Network Integration

A layered services approach involves an assumption that some journeys will involve a transfer between services. Being able to easily transfer between services would require:

¹ PT Plan 7.1.1 (b)

² See public transport service priorities, PT Plan 7.3.1 Table 7, and Section 6.4 policy 11.2

- integrated fares and ticketing
- infrastructure at interchange points, including shelter and information
- measures that mitigate the impact of transfers on the transport disadvantaged, including wheel chair users, unsteady or frail walkers, and the visually or hearing impaired who may have difficulty accessing information or identifying transfer stops.

While the Council supports the policy and methods that call for well-designed public transport interchanges and provision of cycle parking at interchanges and railway stations³, at this point, there is insufficient information in the PT Plan to provide assurances that the issues identified above will be addressed in a timely manner.

In particular, the policies relating to integrated fares and ticketing are to 'maintain and enhance existing integrated fare products⁴', with no reference to introducing new products, and refer to 'aspirations'⁵ rather than plans for an integrated ticketing system.

The Council recommends the inclusion of a clear statement in the PT Plan confirming that applying the layered service approach to public transport decision making will include addressing existing barriers to transferring between services prior to changing service patterns.

5. Fare Policy

The PT Plan provides for a farebox recovery target of 55-60% for rail and bus services, 80-90% for ferry services, and 100% for the cable car, and NZTA has a national farebox recovery target of not less than 50%.

Public transport affordability is increasingly an issue in Wellington. Quality of Life surveys have shown a substantial decrease in the percentage of Wellingtonians who agree or strongly agree that public transport is affordable, from 72% in 2003, to 68% in 2007, and 46% in 2010⁶. A reduction of the farebox recovery target to not less than 50% would allow affordability to be improved, either generally or for specific target groups, while still contributing fairly to NZTA's national target. If the national target is raised over time, Wellington would then be in step with the rest of the country.

Public transport affordability for students was identified as the most important public transport issue by the Council's Youth Council, and it has also been raised as an issue by tertiary students associations over the last 12 months. Students in Auckland receive a 40% fare discount on standard bus and rail services that was introduced following analysis that showed that the increased subsidy costs would be lower than the economic benefits resulting from increased patronage, partly as students are a particularly price sensitive group. The Council is not aware of similar analysis having been undertaken in Wellington, but it is likely that similar results would occur here.

It is recommended that

³ PT Plan Section 6.1 Policy 2.3

⁴ PT Plan Section 6.3 Policies 8.1 and 8.2

⁵ PT Plan Section 6.3 Policy 8.2 Method 1

⁶ Quality of Life in New Zealand Cities; reports for 2010, 2007, 2003

- the farebox recovery target is reduced to ‘not less than 50%’
- consideration is given to the introduction of concessionary fares for students.

6. Infrastructure

The Council supports the adoption of the NZTA Vehicle Quality Standards, and the inclusion of methods to address accessibility, energy efficiency, vehicle emissions and noise levels⁷. These issues are particularly important given the people-centred, eco-city nature of Wellington.

The PT Plan states that new vehicle standards for buses will be phased in as new contracts are awarded. The policies and methods refer to:

- requiring the use of super-low floor buses in contracts ‘where appropriate’
- requiring ‘appropriate’ Euro standards for vehicle emissions for the diesel bus fleet.

It is unclear what ‘appropriate’ means in this context. The Council would support the PT Plan including more concrete goals and timelines for improving the accessibility of buses and reducing the emissions profile of the bus fleet. The Regional Land Transport Strategy has a target for 90% of public transport services to be wheelchair accessible by 2020 (the 2009/10 level was 60%), but the PT Plan does not provide any information about how quickly that goal will be achieved. The Council would also like to see the inclusion of a timetable for improvements to public transport information, including bus and route accessibility (such as an accessibility layer to the Journey Planner), ‘real time’ information, and audible information on buses.

Safety

The Council supports the policies and methods that relate to improving the safety of public transport operations and reducing pedestrian accidents⁸, although it should be noted that pedestrian safety is not solely an infrastructure issue, but also relates to driving behaviour and speed. Accordingly, Council recommends that safety objectives are included in operator contracts and the performance monitoring framework.

Infrastructure Maintenance

The Council supports the policy of maintaining high quality infrastructure⁹. The PT Plan notes that most public transport infrastructure (such as trolley bus wires and rail tracks) is not owned or managed by Greater Wellington, but that Greater Wellington will advocate for and encourage asset providers to maintain their assets required to achieve a high quality public transport service.

Effective maintenance of long life assets (such as trolley bus wires) requires certainty about the long term plans for use of the assets, and the Council recommends that the PT Plan includes an additional method to provide owners of public transport assets with the information required for long term planning of maintenance and renewals. Failure to provide this certainty constrains investment decisions in the city.

⁷ PT Plan Section 6.2 objective 5

⁸ PT Plan Section 6.2, objectives 5 and 6

⁹ PT Plan section 6.2, objective 6 policy 6.2

7. Commercial Arrangements

The Council supports the objective and policies that aim to provide a public transport network that provides value for money. It is disappointing that the development of the new public transport operating model (known as PTOM) is not complete, as the implementation of PTOM is the proposed method to achieve this objective, and the Council supports the earliest possible agreement and implementation of new contracting and procurement arrangements, so that the implementation of any changes required by the Wellington Bus Review is not delayed.

8. Summary of Recommendations

The Council supports the general approach signalled in the PT Plan, but seeks changes in a number of areas:

- The classification of routes and service levels for the rapid transit network and quality transit network should be reviewed:
 - The bus routes south of the Wellington Railway Station should be re-categorised as part of the quality transit network, and reassessed after the completion of the Wellington Public Transit Spine Study.
 - The service levels for the quality transit network should be reviewed, with the standard off-peak frequency to 15 minutes.
 - Additional service level information should be included, such as guidelines for service reliability and punctuality.
- Public transport funding priorities should include improving services on the rapid transit network and quality transit network where standard service levels are insufficient to meet demand
- It should be confirmed that applying the layered service approach to public transport decision making will include addressing existing barriers to transferring between services, and this will be done prior to changing service patterns.
- The farebox recovery target should be reduced to 'not less than 50%', and increased over time in line with national policy.
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of concessionary fares for students.
- The PT Plan should include concrete goals and timelines for improving the accessibility of buses and improving public transport information, including bus and route accessibility (such as an accessibility layer to the Journey Planner), 'real time' information at bus stops and audible information on buses.
- The PT Plan should include concrete goals and timelines for reducing the emissions profile of the bus fleet.
- Safety objectives, including objectives for pedestrian safety, should be included in operator contracts and the performance monitoring framework.
- The PT Plan should include an additional method to provide owners of public transport assets with the information required for long term planning of maintenance and renewals.
- There should be a goal to agree and implement new contracting and procurement arrangements as soon as possible.