

APPENDIX 1 –

**HAITAITAI BUS TUNNEL - PROPOSED TRAFFIC
RESOLUTION**

HATAITAI / PIRIE STREET BUS TUNNEL

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1. Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current use of the bus tunnel and consider options for rationalising bus use and reducing illegal vehicle and pedestrian/cycle use of the tunnel.

2. Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Council continues to prohibit pedestrian and cycle use at all times
2. Council allows only buses, both in service and out of service to use the tunnel at all times.

3. Discussion

The Problem

Concerns have been raised at the illegal use of the bus tunnel by pedestrians. This came about after a pedestrian was struck by a car in the tunnel on the evening of 31 January 2009.

The Mt Victoria Residents' association have also raised concerns about the amount of illegal use of the tunnel by buses not in service and private motor vehicles. The non scheduled buses tend to be those relocating during the day and the illegal private cars are all day but particularly noticeable during the evening once the buses cease to run.

The Current Situation

Currently pedestrians and private motor vehicles are prohibited from using the bus tunnel at all times. The only vehicles that are permitted are scheduled public transport service vehicles.

We have had numerous requests from Taxi companies that they should be allowed to use the tunnel.

The tunnel is generally used by buses between 6am and midnight, although at weekends there are three late night buses that leave Courtenay Place at 1, 2 and 3am.

Go Wellington have expressed concern about the unnecessary delay to buses that have to give way to cars illegally using the tunnel.

The Mt Victoria Residents Association, represented by Mr Kent Duston have expressed concern about the number of vehicles travelling along Pirie Street, these vehicles fall under one of three categories

1. Cars using the tunnel during bus operating hours
2. Cars using the tunnel after bus operating hours
3. Non scheduled buses using the tunnel.

There are reports that pedestrians and cyclists use the tunnel throughout the day, but we do not have a specific numbers, only to say that they are very low.

The most recent measured daily traffic volumes show that approximately 500 vehicles per day use the tunnel, in both directions.

There are approximately 70 cars and 430 buses using the tunnel everyday.

A check of the MetLink timetable information for the bus stop at the top of Pirie Street shows that there are 379 scheduled services passing that location. In addition to these services there will be other scheduled services that don't stop in Pirie Street such as express services.

A search of the crash database shows that over the last 30 years there have been 5 reported crashes in the tunnel.

1986	7.30pm	car reversed into another car	No injury
1998	12.30am	Pedestrian struck by bus	Serious injury
2004	8.20am	Car hit bus head on	No injury
2009	3.00am	Pedestrian struck by car	Serious injury
2009	4.30pm	Pedestrian struck by bus	Minor injury

The serious injury crash that occurred earlier this year was the catalyst for reviewing the use of the tunnel. A pedestrian while walking home from Courtenay Place late on a Saturday night was struck by an unknown vehicle. Neither the pedestrian nor the vehicle were permitted to be in the tunnel at that time.

There is very little street lighting in the tunnel, just a few lights at each end to help the transition. There is also very little opportunity for a pedestrian to get clear of passing vehicles, there are a few recesses available but these are not lit or marked, and are therefore not safe to use.

Options

There have been a number of meetings and discussions on various aspects of the use of the tunnel. These meeting have explored options for improvement, a list of options discussed is set out below.

Option 1 – Status Quo

Leave the tunnel as it is now, with speed humps to control vehicle speeds and signs prohibiting the use of the tunnel to pedestrians and all vehicles except in-service buses

Benefits – no additional costs

Disbenefits – pedestrians and motorists could continue to use the tunnel illegally increasing the possibility of further crashes and delays to bus services

Option 2 – Gates closed at night to allow after hours pedestrian access

This has been raised by a number of parties as a simple solution, gates or bollards that would be manually locked after the last scheduled service and unlocked early in the morning. The cost of installing gates/barriers/bollards has been estimated at \$20,000.

Benefits - This would allow pedestrians to walk through the tunnel with confidence that they would not be struck by a vehicle in the tunnel.

Disbenefits – Only a minimal walking catchment would benefit and the demand would be very small. The tunnel would need to have lighting installed for its entire length and the surface ungraded. Personal security could also be compromised. Go Wellington also indicated that would like to extend some of their services to run later and begin earlier, this would shorten the window in which pedestrians could legally use the tunnel. It was felt that a pedestrian that had walked up Pirie Street to the entrance to the tunnel only to find that it was still open would probably chance their luck rather than walking back down and using the Mt Victoria Tunnel, and potentially increasing the likelihood of a crash.

There is also a concern that if the gate were to be vandalised that it may not be able to be opened for the morning service, this could cripple bus services throughout Wellington.

Option 3 – Status Quo but with increased enforcement

This has been raised mainly by Mr Duston of the Mt Victoria Residents Association.

Benefits - Increased enforcement could lead to a reduction in vehicles using the tunnel and the adjacent Pirie Street. Fewer vehicles using the tunnel during the day could improve bus service and would reduce road noise and disruption to residents of Mt Victoria and Hataitai. It has been proposed that a fixed camera be installed outside the tunnel recording all offenders.

Disbenefits – the Police have indicated that traditional enforcement at the tunnel is a low priority and could not be justified because of the low number of offenders and the relatively low number of crashes. The cost of installing and operating a fixed camera would be high and probably a resource better used elsewhere. Based on similar installations of CCTV cameras suitable for recording licence details and communication back to WCC offices it is likely to cost up to \$35,000.

Currently all enforcement of offences in the tunnel must be undertaken by the Police. The Police have said that if we were to capture an image of an offender and provide them with a file outlining all of the details they would be prepared to issue an infringement notice, however the payment would then go through to central government. The Police will not analyse raw footage.

It is possible for WCC to redesignate the tunnel to become a “Bus Only” area, this would then allow us to enforce this using Tenix or other such company and the infringement notices would come back to WCC.

Option 4 – Install a mechanical device that only allows bus use at all times

A bollard that retracted into the ground or a gate system that was opened only by buses could be installed at each end, signage advising pedestrians and cyclists are prohibited would still need to be in place. There are a number of options possible:

- buses could have an electronic tag fixed to the bus that automatically activated the gate or bollard when the bus was close
- bus drivers could have a transmitter that they used to activate the gate or bollard
- In ground loops that only allowed large vehicles to use the tunnel, this could be problematic for smaller buses or service vehicles.
- A GPS system fitted to buses to work with the Real Time Information project could also be used for the tunnel, this has added benefits of only allowing in-service buses to use the tunnel.

Benefits – This provides the greatest benefit to improving bus services by reducing unnecessary delay caused by illegal use of the tunnel and removing the unwanted illegal late night activity that concerns local residents.

Disbenefits – failure of the system could lead to significant operational issues, costs are high.

To supply and install two mechanical bollards, one at each end and controllers with necessary cabling for power supply, loops and communications is expected to be \$150,000 - \$200,000. There will also be ongoing operational and maintenance costs with whatever system is installed.

Option 5 – Allow all bus movements to use the tunnel

Currently only buses on a scheduled service are authorised to use the tunnel. It is proposed to make the most of the tunnel that we allow all bus movements. The recent survey shows that of the 430 recorded bus movements through the tunnel, 30-50 are likely to be unscheduled.

NZ Bus has indicated that if all bus movements were to be allowed through the tunnel at all times, and then based on today’s schedules we could expect to have up to 50 additional movements over the scheduled movements. Effectively this is no more than currently use the tunnel. NZ Bus are concerned that out of service buses using the tunnel during busy times could compromise the efficiency of the tunnel, their preference is to continue running out of services buses on other parts of the network.

Benefits – the alternative trolley route is via Constable Street, this requires buses to travel unnecessarily through the busy congested Newtown area. Diesel Buses have an option of travelling through the Mt Victoria tunnel, however this can also be congested, it is felt that the dedicated Hataiatia Bus Tunnel is the better route for all buses, subject to the operational needs of the bus operators

Disbenefits – The residents of Pirie Street and Waitoa Road may have to contend with some additional traffic. (approximately 50 more movements than scheduled)

Option 6 – Allow Taxis to use the tunnel

Benefits – Reduced travel time for taxi customers, better connection to the airport.

Disbenefits – Reduction in bus performance through the tunnel, increase in noise and disruption to the residents of Pirie Street and Waitoa Road. Unlike buses, taxis are not high occupancy vehicles and importantly can choose other routes.

4. Conclusion

The extent of the unscheduled bus services using the tunnel does not significantly contribute to negative environmental or safety concerns.

Illegal car use is of a low order and should be dealt with by occasional Police enforcement as resources allow.

It is not recommended that we spend any further time investigating an automated bollard or gate system. Indicatively a robust system that is only accessed by buses is likely to cost \$200,000 to install and \$20,000 annually to operate. This option is considered to be a very poor use of Council funds.

Recommendation:

- Continue to prohibit pedestrian and cycle use at all times
- Allow only buses, both in service and out of service to use the tunnel at all times.

A traffic resolution report is required to allow out-of-schedule buses to legally use the tunnel, this also gives us the opportunity to reconfirm with Councillors the prohibition on walking and cycling. The resolution could also change the status to a “Bus Only” lane that could be enforced by Council in the future, rather than the Police.