
REPORT 1

**SUBMISSION ON DRAFT WELLINGTON REGIONAL PUBLIC
TRANSPORT PLAN**

1. Purpose of report

This report outlines the key matters raised in the Council's submission to the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) on the draft Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan (draft PT Plan). A draft copy of the Council's submission is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Executive summary

Public Transport patronage in the Wellington region has declined in recent years. A total of 35,155,888 passenger trips were made on the region's public bus, train and ferry services in the 2012/13 financial year, a decrease of 1.01% over 2011/12. Wellington City Council (WCC) wishes to see this decline reversed and endorses GWRC's focus on growing public transport patronage. WCC seeks significant concessions, including off peak discounts.

Affordability is a key factor for commuters when choosing which mode of transport to use, with a very clear correlation between fare increases and reductions in patronage levels. Accordingly, WCC does not agree with the proposed fare increase scheduled to take effect from 1 November 2014.

In addition, GWRC has set its overall public transport fare box recovery policy target at 52%, which is above the national average of 50% set by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA). GWRC intends to review its policy target to achieve alignment with the national average and WCC supports this review as a high priority.

Currently there is a cross-subsidisation between trains and buses with the fare box recovery rate for bus and trains set at 58% and 54% respectively. Rail is an important feature of the region's public transport network but with the majority of trips being by bus WCC contends that it is only reasonable that bus fares should be comparable with trains.

Council supports GWRC's intention to move towards integrated ticketing but is concerned about the timeframe for this project and its implementation. The Council is recommending that this work be given a greater priority.

GWRC notes in its draft PT Plan, that whichever bus fleet option is chosen "a low emission vehicle will be essential". WCC supports this and notes that in order to make the right decision extensive research and analysis will be required. In the Council's view, however, the current timetable does not allow

sufficient time for this. WCC is also concerned that GWRC's conclusion that the trolley buses should no longer form part of the bus network is premature. WCC is therefore requesting that GWRC delay decisions on the bus fleet, including the trolley buses, pending more in-depth analysis of the options and associated costs.

The PT Plan represents a partnership between the region's territorial authorities, the regional council and NZTA. WCC expects to work closely with its partners to achieve an efficient, reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive public transport system for the Wellington region.

3. Recommendations

Officers recommend that the Transport & Urban Development Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Approve the submission on Greater Wellington Regional Council's draft Public Transport Plan.*

4. Background

The Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan sets the direction for public transport in the region for the next 10 years.

The draft PT Plan is an update on the 2011 Plan. It takes account of new legislation and new proposals for the public transport network to implement:

- The Wellington PT Spine
- The new bus network and changes to the bus fleet
- Rail Scenario 1 from the Regional Rail Plan
- A fare structure review and introduction of integrated fares and ticketing.

The Wellington region has a high-quality public transport network and Wellington has the highest number of people using public transport in the country – 72 trips per capita last year, compared with 47 in Auckland and 20 in Christchurch.

However, patronage rates have seen a decline in recent years and WCC wishes to see this trend reversed. The Council's submission on the draft PT Plan comments on the range of interventions it considers will bring this change about.

5. Discussion

5.1 Improving Public Transport

Council endorses GWRC's intention to grow public transport patronage, and believes this should be addressed across the board and not just at peak which is GWRC's current focus. To that end WCC supports the notion of off peak

discounts but at the higher rate of 50% than the 25% currently proposed in order to achieve the estimated 10% increase in patronage.

In addition we support the proposed changes to the public transport network - if these will better meet the needs of our communities. Comments we have received from some of our residents about specific routes suggest that further discussions with affected communities is required.

5.2 Implementing the PT Spine

The draft PT Plan has highlighted the importance of aligning the various transport plans and initiatives, including the results of the PT Spine Study. 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 being established to ensure this work is fully aligned.

5.3 Bus Fleet Options

GWRC is considering the following fleet options:

1. Maintaining the current mix of diesel and trolley buses, with new trolley buses
2. Modern diesel buses
3. Hybrid buses – electric and diesel
4. Electric buses

GWRC has noted that **a low emission vehicle will be essential** and will be assessing the options against criteria including:

- The impact on passengers
- The needs of the PT network
- Their costs
- Their environmental impacts

GWRC's initial evaluation results indicate that:

- Options 2, 3, and 4 each have lower costs and higher benefits maintaining the current mix of diesel and trolley buses using new trolley buses (option 1)
- All 4 options have lower localised emissions than the current bus fleet as a result of removing older diesel buses from the fleet. The hybrid and opportunity electric options also have lower carbon emissions than option 1.

GW have said that in light of these results, and the fact that trolley buses make bus routes relatively inflexible and slow journeys because they are not able to pass other trolley buses, the new network has been designed on the basis that the trolley buses no longer operates after the expiry of the current operating contract in 2017.

Wellington has a once in a generation opportunity to decide on motive power for its bus fleet. 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 before committing to a single option.

The future of the trolley buses is also a once in a lifetime decision. WCC believes GWRC's decision that the trolley buses should no longer form part of the city's bus network is premature. The Council is well aware that there are a wide range of views about the trolley buses and a great deal of interest from the public on the issue of motive power. The Council is therefore requesting that GWRC delay decisions on the bus fleet, including the trolley buses, pending more in-depth analysis of the options and associated costs.

GWRC has noted that decisions on bus fleet will be made by GWRC and NZTA, however it is the Council's expectation that they will work closely with WCC on this important decision.

5.4 Bus Network

The Wellington City bus network was reviewed in 2011/12 and found that it had become complicated for users and inefficient, with duplicated and under-and-over supplied services to some areas. The review concluded that resources could be saved by 'hubbing' some services and reducing route duplication, and redirecting these resources towards improving services to poorly serviced areas.

Following consultation (which attracted 6,000 submissions) the Wellington City Bus Network was adopted in November 2012. This has since been aligned with the PT Spine Study outcomes and the proposed bus routes reworked to include:

- A north-south spine linking Johnsonville to Island Bay via Wellington and Newtown
- An east-west spine linking Karori to Seatoun via Wellington, Kilbirnie and Miramar

GW believe that the changes will deliver:

- Greater access to high frequency routes
- More frequent off-peak services
- New weekend services and services running later
- Reduced duplication
- A simplified network (34 vs 43 routes now)
- Reduced CBD bus congestion (the proposal is that buses operating on the most congested streets – Taranaki, Willis/Victoria - will not be routed across town)

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. We note, however, that some members of our community have raised issues about specific routes that will require further consultation.

WCC anticipates that significant savings will result from cost efficiencies and notes that this could be applied as fare subsidies to increase patronage.

5.5 Rail

Rail is an important feature of the region's public transport network and WCC supports the implementation of Rail Scenario 1 which aims to deliver:

- An increase in the electric rail fleet peak seat capacity
- A new 'clockface' timetable and service patterns to provide at least four trains per hour to Wellington on all electrified lined during the morning peak
- Network hubs at Waterloo and Porirua to allow up to five trains per hour during the morning peak

There is a question, however, 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 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.

5.6 Fare Structure Review and Integrated Ticketing

The objectives of the changes being sought are:

- To make the network simpler and easier to use
- To provide better value for money
- The ability to use one smart card for all PT travel
- The introduction of integrated fares resulting in no additional costs for journeys requiring more than one service or mode

The existing 14 zones radiating from the CBD will be retained.

The following concessions are being proposed:

- Free travel on all services for children under five years old
- A 50% concession fare on all services for children and young adults aged from five to 18 (or until they leave secondary school if that is later). This would increase young people's eligibility age from 15 to 18
- Continued free travel for all SuperGold card holders outside peak hours

GWRC has also suggested that other existing concessions could be replaced with an off-peak fare, which would provide a 25% saving on the adult non-cash fare outside peak times.

GWRC is also proposing a range of other concessions and services including:

- Fare capping, where the total fare paid is capped at a set amount
- Weekend family passes

- A bulk purchase product, enabling group purchases at a discounted rate

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 but does not address the fact that recent fare increases have been followed by a drop in patronage levels, illustrating the very clear correlation between the two. On this basis WCC does not support the proposed fare increase scheduled to take effect from 1 November 2014.

WCC supports, as a priority, the review of the fare box recovery policy target to align GWRC's current target of 52% with the national average of 50% set by NZTA.

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.

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.

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.

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 and asks that this work be given greater priority.

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. WCC will be encouraging 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.

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

WCC expects to work closely with GWRC on all the matters discussed in its submission to achieve a reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive public transport system for the Wellington region.

5.8 Financial considerations

Depending on decisions made in relation to the trolley buses, there may be some costs to WCC in the future related to the dismantling of the trolley bus infrastructure. Financial costs related to the implementation of the PT Spine have not yet been determined.

5.9 Climate change impacts and considerations

WCC is recommending that GWRC carry out further in-depth analysis on bus fleet options and the future of the trolley bus network before final decisions are made.

Consideration of the impact of the options on climate change will be an important component of this work.

5.10 Long-term plan considerations

There are no specific long-term plan considerations resulting from the draft PT Plan.

6. Conclusion

The current downward trend in patronage levels is alarming and must be stemmed. 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 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 does not support the proposed fare increase signalled for later this year.

In addition, while rail is an important feature of the region's PT network, the majority of trips are by bus. Accordingly WCC believes it is only reasonable that bus fares should be comparable with trains.

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. The Council believes decisions on the bus fleet, including the trolley buses, must be delayed pending more in-depth analysis of the options and associated costs.

WCC is a key partner with GWRC, the councils in the Wellington region and NZTA in determining the future of the region's public transport network. Council looks forward to working closely with GWRC and our other partners to achieve an efficient, reliable, accessible, affordable and attractive public transport system for the Wellington region.

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