

9 May 2014

Draft Regional Public Transport Plan Submissions 2014
Freepost 3156
Greater Wellington Regional Council
P.O. Box 11646
Wellington 6142

Re: Draft Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan

This submission is from the Architectural Centre, an incorporated society dating from 1946, which represents both professionals and non-professionals interested in the promotion of good design.

1. Support for the Public Transport Spine

We strongly support the PT spine, especially its extension to the airport (pp. 46-47). We understand the current intention is to implement this spine using a variety of means such as bus priority, and dedicated bus lanes, but not necessarily dedicated bus lanes along the whole extent of the route. We are also aware that projects such as the Basin Bridge have become associated with the PT spine. We do not believe that a successful PT spine is dependant on having a flyover at the Basin Reserve (p. 29), but do consider that grade separation at the Basin (p. 30), while not completely necessary, would be advantageous.

The issues currently being debated at the Basin Board of Inquiry will, we believe, be equally relevant to other parts of the city, especially the CBD. The Regional Public Transport Plan consultation document, for example, explicitly identifies "pinch points," such as around the Old Bank building on the corner of Willis Street and Lambton Quay," an assumed need for "Some localised road widening ... with more significant widening along the State Highway 1 corridor affecting the town belt," and some "restricted access to some buildings in the CBD" (pp. 30, 31). We consider that such moments, where the urban fabric may be adversely impacted on by corridor widening, require rethinking about the relative importance of the urban realm and transport priorities. It is likely that there will be places where the built environment should be prioritised over singular transport objectives in order to guarantee a rich and varied inner city environment. The reference to the Urban Design Protocol is relevant (p. 69).

2. Support for integrated fares and ticketing

The Architectural Centre strongly supports integrated public transport ticketing across all transport modes, including transfers within a journey, and capped fares (pp. 60-61, 71-72). The bus route to/from the airport should be included in these fare initiatives. We also encourage the GWRC to consider the potential for PT smartcard compatibility with other NZ cities, such as the case with Snapper in Auckland. In addition to convenience for travelling Wellingtonians, a national PT card would facilitate tourist use of public transport throughout the country.

The consultation document refers to "initiatives to reduce boarding times as part of the integrated fares and ticketing project" (p. 68). In addition to smartcards, backdoor entry is another initiative which may increase boarding times.



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3. Support for a LRT corridor from Railway Station to the Airport

While we acknowledge that a decision has been made by the Regional Transport Committee to support BRT, the Architectural Centre strongly supports the GWRC and WCC planning for LRT. This would include ensuring that there is a viable LRT corridor between Wellington airport and railway station, and we support protecting transport corridors "from the impacts of future development by Wellington City Council" (p. 31), though - as suggested above - a bulldozing attitude to some pinch points may result in adverse urban design and heritage effects.

4. Support for renewable energy for Public Transport

The Architectural Centre supports the retention of the trolley buses (pp. 33-34), because they run on electricity. We do not support the conversion of the bus fleet to diesel, and do not believe that a solid case for replacing trolley buses has been made. We note that the Executive Summary states an aim to "Reduce the production of carbon emissions from the public transport network" (2h, p 9), and we strongly support this aim. We also consider that issues of embodied energy are relevant and need to be factored into decision-making regarding whether or not vehicles are replaced, or upgraded.

In a similar vein, vehicle design can support low-energy use. The provision of well-designed openable windows, rather than using airconditioning, would appear commonsense. For example, in a context where buses are frequently stopping and opening their doors, patrons are dressed for the outside climate, and there are a large number of people, the usual winter heating often does not improve the internal bus climate.



5. Support for better bus stop/train station infrastructure

We appreciate that the consultation document mentions the need for well-designed infrastructure (e.g. pp. 67, 69), including for bus stops, shelters and transport interchanges. We consider this to be an important issue which is critical to get right, and strongly advise the GWRC to produce more detail regarding possible designs for infrastructure and consult further with the public regarding this aspect of PT.

We also support the proposal to include better cycling facilities (cycle stands, but also bike boxes) at park and rides (p. 69), and further implementation of real time timetable information at PT stops (pp. 8, 73). We also note that it is anticipated that there will be a "Need for users to access median bus stops along parts of [the] route" (p. 30). We consider that it would be useful for the plan to indicate what is envisaged with respect to this.

6. Farebox recovery

We consider that a more sophisticated financial model is needed than farebox recovery (p. 80), and we realise that achieving this might be as much a political

issue as a commonsense one. By isolating public transport off from the costs and benefit structures of other transport modes - through the farebox recovery model - public transport is disadvantaged. Such isolation also prevents using financial mechanisms to influence shifts in mode share.

As a consequent of this thinking, the Centre considers that rather than off-peak discounted fares, the GWRC should implement a model of peak-discounting, as it is during peak time, when congestion is greatest, that shifting car users onto public transport would have the greatest community benefit. This can only make economic sense if the community costs of private car use are also factored into the financial model used to establish fares and rate of return etc.. In this regard we note the stated role of public transport to "[d]ecrease severe traffic congestion, particularly in the morning and afternoon peak periods" (p. 18).

We believe that the GWRC consequently needs to adopt a financial mode which enables more innovative strategies which will support their stated aims, such as reducing congestion through increased PT use. More cross modal thinking would link financial structures such as net farebox income to other TDM strategies such as pricing car parking in the CBD.



7. Geographic-specific mode share targets

The Centre agrees with the need to "Ensure that integrated walking, cycling and public transport services are considered when designing and delivering interchanges and other facilities" (p. 70). In addition, we consider that PT mode share targets and ticket pricing would be productively related to geographic distance from CBD. For example, we recommend establishing very high targets for walking, and low targets for bus passengers boarding inward buses, close to the CBD. We also encourage the GWRC to actively design the bus zones close to the CBD so they directly relate to average walking and cycling distances (i.e. bus zone 1 easily walkable distance; bus zone 2 easily cyclable distance). This would support the observation that "it makes sense for residents to walk or cycle instead of driving or using public transport" in the CBD (p. 20).

Bus fare structures could be designed to disincentivise inward zone 1 travel on sunny days for example. We also consider that targets ought to also be relative to population growth and peak-time.

We also support the proposal to require operators to provide for the safe carriage of cycles on appropriate rail and ferry services (p. 70), and the trialing of bike racks on buses (p. 25), and we encourage the GWRC to advance towards full capacity for these facilities on all services in the not too distant future.

8. Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM)

We note that there is to be a shift to a Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) which will require "Incentives to reduce a reliance on subsidies by promoting the

increased commerciality of service provision" (p. 76), and "Units ... [that are] attractive to a tenderer and should attract competition from a range of operators" (p. 78). We are not convinced about the adoption of this commercial model, and stress that ultimately PT is a service, which has community-wide benefits. We refer to our comments regarding Farebox recovery above, and stress the importance of "community needs" (p. 78).

9. The Golden Mile

The consultation document refers to "faster journey times through the Golden Mile and to the suburbs" (p. 29). The Centre considers that bus frequency is a more important characteristic of successful public transport, and hopes that the proposed combination of larger vehicles and faster journey times is not at the expense of bus frequencies. We note that the plan proposes 36% fewer public transport vehicles along the Golden Mile, suggesting a significant reduction in frequency along this important city route. We consider that fixing a maximum wait time for the Embassy to Railway route of say 2 minutes from say 7am-7pm is a more appropriate way of thinking about the Golden Mile.

10. BRT: larger, less frequent buses

We are aware that part of this proposal includes increased bus size (high-capacity vehicles p. 29), and - for some parts of the city - less frequent service. The Centre understands that bus frequency (rather than, for example, travel time reductions) is a very important quality appreciated by bus users, consequently we are opposed to any reduction in bus frequency.

We are also conscious, given some of Wellington's tight streets, that there may be issues of conflict between bus size and urban fabric.



11. Proposed PT network

We have the following observations to make about the proposed new PT network (pp. 38-52):

(a) we support a maximum waiting time for the different types of services, but we consider a maximum waiting time of 10min is more appropriate than 15min for core bus routes (p. 45).

(b) we are not convinced about the proposition that "Buses operating on the most congested bus corridors (Taranaki Street and Willis/Victoria Streets), where opportunities for bus priority are more limited, are not routed across town" (p. 47). We consider that one of the very successful aspects of the current bus network is the confluence of the different routes into the CBD in such a way that the Embassy to Railway route has an extremely high frequency of buses, meaning that you are guaranteed almost immediate cross town travel during working hours.

(c) we are not completely sure about the idea of "suburban hubs to service low-demand areas" (p. 47) and encourage the GWRC to implement this idea progressively to test its success prior to full implementation.

(d) the reduction of bus services around the airport will negatively impact on those who do not live close to the airport bus route (e.g. those in the southern suburbs), who with integrated ticketing and bus transfers will not be so economically disadvantaged. Reduction of the airport bus fares would help to some extent, but there will remain significant time disadvantages for some. In addition, we suspect that having a single airport route is insufficient for such important regional infrastructure.

(e) we consider that routes requiring double transfers should be identified (e.g. to/from the VUW Kelburn Campus, Wellington Hospital, Miramar etc.) and rethought.

(f) a number of peak services are proposed to finish at 6pm, rather than the current 7pm, which will limit some travel, and disadvantage a number of travellers.

12. Other issues

In addition to the above, we make the following, final comments:

(a) while we acknowledge reference being made to the mobility impaired (p. 69) and transport disadvantaged (pp. 10, 75), we also consider that more attention (in addition to the SuperGold card initiative (p. 71)) needs to be paid to the increasing numbers of older people, who may be mobile, but who may have other transport-related issues (e.g. susceptibility to cold weather exacerbated by badly designed bus shelters).

(b) we consider that bus reliability becomes more critical in bad weather. Wellington can experience both rain and strong winds, which are conditions which most adshelter bus shelters cannot perform well in. Buses arrive late and bus patrons get drenched and become ill. Such critical threshold conditions are the vital ones to both actively consider and get right. We could not see any mention of specific bad-weather strategies and we consider this is an important aspect of a comprehensive PT strategy.

(c) much of the focus is on shifting from car use to PT use. Perhaps a focus on reducing car ownership might be productive. To achieve this flexible car share systems, such as "goget" in Melbourne (<http://www.goget.com.au/how-it-works/>), which make not owning a car viable, should be implemented in Wellington - perhaps facilitated by the council as an initiative to be sold once established?

(d) generally the proposed rail changes appear to be positive and will likely benefit most rail commuters.

(e) the GWRC ought to consider the provision of free wifi on all PT services.

13. Conclusion

Public Transport will never compete on travel times with the private car unless drastic changes are made in the allocation of road space. The Centre considers that the GWRC broaden its thinking regarding the benefits of PT beyond the pragmatic issues of "reliability, punctuality and customer service" (p. 68). For some

patrons it may be the friendly face of their morning bus driver, or the consideration of a driver waiting for elderly patrons to be seated. The human aspects of public transport and a culture of consideration and generosity is an important attraction for many PT users. We speculate that a narrow focus on travel time may not reap the mode share changes the GWRC is seeking, and that broader robust thinking around these issues could potentially reap massive benefits to the PT network.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on this Draft Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Christine McCarthy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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