

30 September 2013

Public Transport Spine Options
Greater Wellington Regional Council
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Re: Public Transport Spine Options

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. Our society's objectives include working for the general improvement of the urban environment.

The Architectural Centre strongly supports improvements to public transport, and congratulates the Council for the work to date. We do however have a number of comments to make regarding this particular proposal, and consider that more work needs to be done on the "Public Transport Spine Options" proposal, prior to a final decision being made.

1. Decisive decision-making is needed

Our first and most important point is that we consider that **Wellington** has reached a critical point where it **must decide if it is to be a public transport, pedestrian and cyclist friendly city, or a private car oriented one**. This is a decision on which the regional and city councils must finally bite the bullet - so to speak - and commit comprehensively to one of these options. The Architectural Centre strongly advocates for a comprehensive commitment to public transport, where public transport decisions are implemented to provide the best outcome, and not be constantly compromised because of fears about removing car parks etc. An example of the compromised and contradictory outcomes include the conflicts generated by the RoNS and the ambition for higher public transport patronage: "Projects such as the Mount Victoria Tunnel duplication, Petone to Grenada and Transmission Gully projects provide significant additional road capacity. This increase in road capacity leads to the forecast decrease in public transport patronage after 2021 as there are decreases in travel time for journeys by car" (Options Evaluation Results [OER] p. 44). We believe that a quality public transport service will benefit all Wellingtonians as well as visitors to the city.

2. Cultural and Sociological Issues.

The study appears to lack any engagement with cultural and sociological issues that impact on the uptake of public transport in Wellington. At a most fundamental level, **the study does not ask what motivates Wellingtonians to use, or not use, public transport**. These are questions which transport engineers are not equipped to research, and there is a need for a wider disciplinary involvement in this study (e.g. behavioural scientists, sociologists) if we are to get a public transport service which will work. More needs to be done with regard to this matter. Failure to find out about these issues and address them will likely result in a large expenditure with insufficient return.

3. Public Transport Attractiveness

We think that the proposal could helpfully address a number of convenience-related issues which we understand are important in encouraging public transport use, specifically:

- (a) frequency
- (b) good connectivity (e.g. route design and transfer stations)



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- (c) reliability (in all weather conditions)
- (d) proximity (and so number) of bus stops
- (e) the availability of transfers (so people who need to take more than one bus to, for example, get to work, are not financially disadvantaged).
- (f) really well-designed and comfortable bus shelters/transit stations (esp. in cold, wet, windy conditions)
- (g) overall ease of use (for both Wellingtonians and tourists), including signage and intuitive design systems.
- (h) price - public transport needs significant subsidies to ensure that it is cheaper than cars because public transport will always be less convenient than private car travel, unless sufficient levels of congestion are maintained as a disincentive for car travel.
- (i) internal vehicle environment
- (j) network capacity
- (k) integrated ticketing

If these issues are not addressed time-saving may not result in significant increases in patronage. Work on improving many of these aspects can begin immediately. Many of these issues are not properly considered within the current study making it insufficient. Frequency, for example, is the most important issue, and there is little consideration of this as a fundamental issue in the study.

We are pleased to note the study indicates that integrated ticketing has support, and we hope this includes a capacity for transfers and the ability for use in other cities throughout the country. In fact we do not understand why there is no automatic transfer capacity in the current Snapper system and consider this something which technically could be implemented immediately. In addition, **we strongly encourage that any improvements in public transport include the provision of free wifi as a way to further attract public transport users.**

4. Urban Public Realm

The study appears to have a monolithic and narrow view of public transport, seemingly forgetting that human beings and urban design are two critical factors in a successful public transport system. We have indicated above the need for expertise regarding human motivation and behaviour. There is equally a need for public transport to be considered in relation to an urban design that is sensitive to the city fabric, and improves the public realm. Internationally, **successful public transport systems are integrated into the built environment of the city in inventive ways which strengthen urban identity and place-making.** The lack of an urban design assessment as part of the study is indicative of a lack which needs addressing in the present study. For example, the requirement of BRT for a dedicated roadway has a tendency to isolate transport systems from their immediate environment. In contrast the wider range of surfaces on which LRT can operate, and its ability to integrate with existing contexts, makes it a more suitable system if respecting city fabric is a priority.

Similarly the requirement for BRT to widen Ruahine Street "beyond that currently envisaged for the entire length" (OER p. 39) clearly indicates the bulldozer mentality inherent to the mindset designing this system, and the negative impacts on the built environment beyond the CBD. This widening is additional to that anticipated by NZTA, which will already significantly encroach on the town belt, and will convert Ruahine Road into a motorway scale barrier. More creative thinking is needed.

5. Internal Vehicle Environment

The study is silent on internal vehicle environment. We consider that this would include issues such as: quality of design, materials and fabrics used to provide robust, clean and comfortable surfaces, but also **aspects of the vehicle interior which can contribute to the attractiveness of public transport use.** This might include: the provision of wifi, more intelligent heating/ventilation system (currently these are crude often being stuffy and inefficient), window design to allow fresh air and minimise wind turbulence for those seated adjacent to windows, smoothness of bus ride (to enable

reading or other productive work), and sufficient capacity and frequency of buses to reduce overcrowding, which is a current experience in peak times, and inclement weather.

6. Ageing Demographic

We are frequently told the population's demography is changing with a significant increase in older people. As people grow older many prefer public transport over private cars due to eyesight or other physical factors, psychological factors and social factors. Winston's Super Gold Card has also helped to increase non-peak travel by the over 65s. **As our population ages it is not unreasonable to expect additional public transport patronage from this group.** They have specific needs from a public transport service which have not been considered at all in the study. These include warm and safe bus stops, bus stop locations, user-friendly information design, and smoother vehicle rides. There will be additional issues which experts such as the New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing will no doubt be able to provide. Given the fact that this institute is Wellington-based at VUW it would be relatively easy to get their input into the study.

7. Route

While the reasons put forward for not extending the PT Spine to the north appear sensible, they are misleading. The presented logic suggests that rail commuters typically only walk a short distance from the railway stations (0.9 km, OER p. 5), suggesting that a seamless PT spine from Ngauranga is not needed. We suggest that there is likely to be a potential patronage from those who drive from the north into the city (to locations further from the railway station), because of the lack of a seamless connection from the railway station to the rest of the CBD. A seamless transport spine will attract these commuters from Ngauranga through to the eastern side of the CBD. A seamless connection could be made in a number of ways, the first step would be to integrate the Lambton Quay bus interchange with the railway station. Currently these are two adjacent interchanges. They need to be **one elegant transfer station with integrated information, wayfinding, and timetabling to facilitate ease of use and ensure that mode-change is an easy, simple and convenient process.**

We also consider that **any new public transport spine needs to link the railway station with the airport**, and we strongly support extending the proposed loop from the Basin to also include the airport. Not including the airport is inconsistent with the *Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Strategy*, and we consider this a major omission. Such a secondary loop could reach as far south as the south coast, recognising the poor levels of east-west connectivity currently provided by public transport (e.g. from the airport to Owhiro Bay). We also note that patronage levels from Island Bay are projected to be similar to those from Miramar (OER p. 27) and so suggest that both should have similar levels of service.

8. Capacity

The study raises a number of issues regarding capacity. Perhaps the most critical of these is that the study indicates that at the point of operation the preferred system will be operating at 101% in the Mt Victoria tunnel (OER pp. 37, 47). This is to say that **the preferred design will be unable to met forecast capacity from when it begins to operate.** In addition, the study's projected patronage is significantly less than that projections in the Regional Land Transport Strategy (OER pp. 25-26; c.f. Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010-40 p. 10).¹ The incapacity of the proposed system clearly indicates that the preferred option needs significant rethinking as the design is flawed.

A second issue of capacity failure is the proposal that about half the current number of vehicles operate along the Golden Mile in the BRT option, supplemented by a

¹ The Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010-40 states: "It is projected that public transport trips will increase 34% in a medium scenario by 2041. Peak period trips are forecast to grow 44%, while inter-peak trips only 25%" (p. 10).

secondary spine during peak periods (Modelling Report Fig 7.2). This is silly. One of the strengths of the current spine through the CBD is that it is a single spine, providing an elegant system, and eliminating user confusion, which a secondary spine would introduce. To have a secondary spine would be a retrograde step. We need to retain the simple and elegant spine that we currently have. The current Golden Mile spine draws people from both sides of it, ensuring parity of access for users across the CBD. We strongly disagree with the proposal for a secondary spine and think that **a high quality PT Spine must be built along the Golden Mile that is designed so it can accommodate appropriate capacity** without the confusion of a secondary parallel route. We consider that this is the most critical part of the PT spine to get right, and support complete removal of cars from the Golden Mile - at least during peak hours. The design of the CBD spine must be singular, integrate well with the existing built environment, anticipate LRT and provide sufficient bus stops, that are well-designed to protect waiting passengers of all ages from bad weather.

9. Bus Priority vs Bus Rapid Transport (BRT) vs Light Rail Transit (LRT)

The Architectural Centre considers that **we as a city must plan long term for a light rail transport spine** as this will provide the best quality and most robust public transport system. Planning for this includes designating routes which will work for LRT (including a dedicated tunnel through Mt Victoria), and budgeting for the implementation of light rail over the long term. In this planning, we need to understand what transport improvements can be made in the short and medium term to both improve the experience of travelling on public transport and to ensure that light rail is achievable in the long term. We therefore do not support the conclusion of the present study which implies that there is a single and conclusive decision regarding vehicle type to be made at this point. Part of this planning should ensure capacity for electrification across the whole network and a graduated move away from fossil-fuels such as petrol and diesel.

10. Accessibility

While we appreciate that a reduced number of bus stops in the CBD will reduce bus-on-bus congestion, we are concerned that the proposed reduction of bus stops in the CBD (from the current seven) to five may reduce the convenience of public transport (Modelling Report Fig 7.1). We believe that this is an important aspect of the scheme and requires specific information regarding the number and location of the proposed bus stops are to be so the community can understand the likely impacts of this on public transport use.

11. Reference Case vs Status Quo and the RoNS

We consider that the use of a Reference Case (which, includes "all relevant projects in the Regional Land transport Programme, including the Roads of National Significance (RoNS), integrated ticketing for public transport and changes plan[n]ed through the Wellington Bus Review" (Summary of Key Findings p. 2)), rather than the status quo, has made it difficult for the general public to understand the scale of potential changes. This is an important point with respect to facilitating public/non-expert understanding of the options, as distinct from presenting the proposal from the logic of a transport policy mindset. The schemes that are yet to be implemented are abstract concepts, the impact of which most public transport users cannot be expected to understand. What they do understand is the current public transport service, and this should be their point of reference in consultations.

We also question the assumption that the RoNS project is beneficial for public transport. We understand that increased road capacity (which is the mechanism which the RoNS depends on to address perceived congestion) will negatively impact on public transport use (e.g. OER p. 44). **Public transport needs congestion in order to be more appealing and convenient than the private car.** Providing greater roading capacity will provide more opportunities for car use, and reduce incentives for public transport patronage. For public transport to work in Wellington we need higher levels of patronage, otherwise any new system will inevitably become rundown, unloved, and under-used.

12. Staging

We strongly encourage the council to implement bus priority measures immediately as part of the longer process toward the implementation of a high quality LRT PT spine from Ngauranga to the Airport.

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission on this draft Public Transport Spine Options proposal.

Yours faithfully

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