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**Committee** Passenger Transport Committee  
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Development

## North Wellington Public Transport Study

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the findings of the technical study and recommend a method for completing the review.

### 2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report do not trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

### 3. Background

#### 3.1 Commencement

The North Wellington Public Transport Study (NWPTS) arose from the decision in November 2004 by Transfund NZ (the predecessor to Land Transport New Zealand) to provide \$276 million of funding to the region over 10 years in response to the Rail Business Case developed by Greater Wellington Regional Council. One of the conditions of that decision was:

*Confirmation by GWRC that a full review of the Business Case will be completed in 3 years, including a review of the passenger transport services to Johnsonville and Melling.*

The base case includes the following works on the Johnsonville Line:

- Minor refurbishment of existing English Electric rolling stock to buy time to allow purchase of new units - \$1.8 million (currently underway)
- Refurbishment of 12 Ganz Mavag units – \$7.2 million
- Purchase of 12 new units – \$36 million
- Tunnel improvements to allow Ganz Mavag units to replace existing English Electrics – \$3 million

- Track improvements to allow for more reliable, and possibly more frequent peak period services - \$5.5 million
- A programme of station refurbishments - \$2.05 million.

The timing for these improvements is being re-evaluated as part of Council's wider rail responsibilities.

In discussion with Wellington City Council (WCC), it was agreed to broaden out the review of the Johnsonville Line to include all public transport services in the northern suburbs of Wellington (the area bounded by Churton Park and Grenada to the north, Woodridge and Newlands to the east, Johnsonville to the west and following the Johnsonville Rail Line south to the Wellington Central Business District).

Transport consultant's Sinclair Knight Mertz (SKM) were appointed to undertake the study. The Study was to be undertaken in three stages which are detailed later in this section.

### **3.2 Reference Group**

As part of the study, a Reference Group was established to provide a sounding board as issues were considered and options developed. The members of the Reference Group are:

- Mayor Kerry Prendergast
- Councillor Fran Wilde
- Councillor Judith Aitken
- Mr Brent Efford (RLTC Sustainability Representative)
- Mr Tony Randle (Johnsonville Commuter)
- Mr Peter McKenzie (Ngāio resident and transport economist).

The Reference Group has been consulted during each major phase of the study and will meet on Monday 13 November to consider the Technical Report.

### **3.3 Stage 1 – identification of issues and needs**

Stage 1 involved the identification of issue and needs for public transport in the suburbs. Public consultation was undertaken in November 2005 which yielded 500 submissions.

The overall themes raised by submitters were the need for a sufficiently frequent, reliable public transport system with convenient routes. The top five issues were frequency of buses, the reliability of bus and train services, the route of the service, the need for new trains, and the rundown state of trains.

### **3.4 Stage 2 – development of scenarios**

Stage 2 of the study involved the development of public transport scenarios to meet the needs identified in stage 1. Four scenarios were developed:

1. Enhanced rail – new or refurbished units and improved timetable;
2. Bus with walking and cycling – replacement of rail with buses running on street, with the existing railway line converted to a walking and cycling track;
3. Busway – replacement of rail with buses running on a guided busway; or
4. Light rail – replacement of rail with a light rail service running on an extended Johnsonville line through to Courtenay Place.

All scenarios also included further enhancements to existing bus services throughout the northern suburbs.

These scenarios were put out for consultation in June and July this year with 1606 submissions received. 981 supported the busway scenario (858 of these on a pro-forma distributed by the Bus and Coach Association), 589 submitters supported enhanced rail, 456 supported light rail, and 68 supported bus with walking and cycling.

Of the 1606 submissions received, 858 were on a form distributed by the Bus and Coach Association, 389 on the standard submission form, 269 were made electronically, and the balance by other ways. Many submissions supported more than one scenario.

A feature of the consultation was the degree of involvement from interested parties. In addition to the involvement of the Bus and Coach Association, Tranz Metro also distributed their own brochure offering to assist people to fill in their submission forms.

### **3.5 Stage 3 – identification of the preferred option**

Stage 3 of the study involved the study consultants undertaking a technical evaluation of the four scenarios against the criteria agreed by the joint project team from the two councils.

This report, which has been distributed to Committee members under separate cover, concludes that none of the scenarios yields sufficient benefits to justify the additional investment and increased operating costs involved. It therefore recommends the adoption of the ‘base case’ in regard to rail, which is essentially a continuation of the status quo apart from new or refurbished rail units. It also recommends incremental improvements to bus services and bus priority measures for the parts of the northern suburbs not directly serviced by rail.

There are two critical sections of the report which lead to these conclusions.

The first is Appendix A. Table 5-2 on page 36, which gives projected mode share, shows that none of the scenarios has the ability to significantly influence public transport mode share, with the spread between the best and worst scenarios as at 2016 being 2% (16%-18%). Table 5-1 on the previous page gives projected patronage growth for each scenario. This shows relatively modest levels of growth, even for the most expensive scenarios.

It is worth noting that all the rail options (base, ER1 and ER2) show rail patronage remaining virtually static over the modelled period, with most of the growth occurring in bus patronage. This result, which is confirmed by transport modelling for other projects, occurs primarily because most of the projected population growth in the suburbs is outside the rail catchments area (e.g. Stebbings Valley and Lincolnshire Farms).

The second critical section is Appendix G. Table 5-45 on page 121 shows the benefits and costs of each option. This table is particularly significant because it reflects the funding criteria used by Land Transport NZ and therefore the likelihood of any scenario obtaining funding.

Under Land Transport NZ funding criteria, the costs and benefits of public transport enhancements are assessed against a base case (essentially the status quo), and the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) is based on the incremental benefits of any option against the base case in relation to its incremental costs. Land Transport NZ advise that they are unable to fund any investment where the BCR is less than 1. Table 5-45 shows that none of the scenarios has a BCR greater than 0.56.

WCC had intended to commission additional work on the sustainability aspects of the Study, including a consideration the impact of rising fuel prices (“peak oil”). However, when it became apparent that none of the scenarios would meet funding criteria, this work was cancelled. These matters have been reported on by SKM in Appendix F.

In addition to the main SKM report, WCC commissioned a report from Derek Kemp, an urban design specialist, to help understand the specific effects of each of the scenarios on the future urban form of the suburbs, and their potential implications on WCC’s urban development aspirations. His report is mainly concerned with the relationships between public transport choice, public transport use, public transport operational efficiency and urban densities, land use planning, urban design and urban form. It found that the busway scenario was clearly superior in terms of the ‘qualitative’ benefits considered in the report.

Further consultation was to have taken place as part of this stage of the study. This would have involved sending out the preferred option to residents and interested parties for their comment. The outcomes sought from this stage of consultation, as set out in the study consultation plan, were:

- 1) *Greater level of understanding among stakeholders and wider community of the issues and reasoning behind the preferred option; and*
- 2) *A clear understanding of the level of support for and opposition to the preferred Passenger Transport Services Strategy.*

### **3.6 The Government’s Position**

On 14 September, Hon Peter Dunne addressed a question in the House to the Minister of Finance on the future of the Johnsonville Line which suggested that the Government had already decided the future of the line. The Chair of

GWRC and the Mayor of WCC wrote to the Minister to seek confirmation of the Government's position. A copy of Dr Cullen's reply is attached (**Attachment 1**). The Government's position is that it would not support the conversion of the Johnsonville Line.

## **4. Comment**

Officers have scrutinised the SKM report and are satisfied that its findings are robust.

### **4.1 Further consultation**

Stage 3 of the study in the original project plan included consultation on the preferred option. Given the conclusions of the technical study undertaking this further consultation is not now recommended. There is no fundable alternative to the status quo. The base case has already been consulted on via the LTCCP process. Further consultation may raise expectations of an alternative outcome that is not available in the circumstances.

Furthermore, it is likely to result in significantly increased costs if the purchase of replacement units cannot be fully coordinated with the wider regional rail unit purchase programme. GW has recently released a document to the marketplace seeking expressions of interest for the supply of 58 new electric rail units for the Wellington regional commuter network, 12 of which are intended for the Johnsonville Line. Responses closed on 7 November and we are intending to issue a Request for Tender to a limited number of suppliers prior to Christmas.

It is likely that there will be economies of scale in purchasing the new units; that is, the more units purchased, the lower the price of each unit. Over 58 units, even a small level of savings per unit could be significant. The original timeframe for this study, which would have had consultation completed by September, would have allowed the study outcomes to feed into the procurement process but the study was delayed as it took more time than originally anticipated to develop, report and consult on the stage 2 scenarios.

GWRC and WCC are joint convenors of the study. However, responsibility for implementing its findings (with the exception of any bus priority measures) lies primarily with GWRC. The Strategy and Policy Committee of WCC is meeting on 16 November to consider a report on the study. It is understood that WCC may ask Greater Wellington to continue with consultation as originally planned. However, Greater Wellington officers recommend that no further consultation be undertaken for the reasons set out above.

### **4.2 Conclusion**

Having considered the findings of the technical report, the views expressed during public consultation, and the position of the Government on alternative use of the Johnsonville Rail Line, it is concluded that the base case, being the minimum investment to retain the rail service and incremental improvements to

bus services and bus priority measures, represents the best option for the provision of passenger transport services in the northern suburbs.

## 5. Communication

The outcome of the study will need to be communicated to the residents of the study area. Two methods are proposed to do this. Firstly, a press release will be prepared following the Committee's decision. Given the strong interest in the study to date it is likely that this will be well reported in local newspapers.

We will also write to those 1606 submitters who supplied contact details to explain the outcome of the process.

## 6. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receives the report;*
2. *Notes the content of the report;*
3. *Agrees that the base case, being the minimum investment to retain the rail service and incremental improvements to bus services and bus priority measures, represents the best option for the provision of passenger transport services in the northern suburbs;*
4. *Agrees that no further consultation be undertaken regarding the North Wellington Public Transport Study; and*
5. *Agrees that the study outcomes be communicated in accordance with section 5 above.*

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### Attachment 1: Advice from the Minister of Finance