



Report 08.357
Date 23 May 2008
File CM/09/03/07

Committee Finance, Evaluation and Risk
Author Dr Jane Bradbury Divisional Manager, Corporate
and Strategy

Evaluation of transport forums

1. Purpose

To report on an evaluation of the effectiveness of Greater Wellington's transport forums that took place around the region in March and April this year.

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

The transport forums were the idea of Councillor Glensor, Deputy Chair of Greater Wellington and Chair of the Transport and Access Committee, who wanted to converse with the public on transport issues in an informal manner and outside the formal submission process. The purpose of the forums was to provide an opportunity for the public to gain a clearer understanding of the public transport matters that Greater Wellington will be grappling with in the immediate future. In recent years we have made a huge investment in our public infrastructure and the forums were to allow our communities and ratepayers to think carefully about future possible investments, given that we have limited funds.

A total of seven forums were held across the region. The location and date of each of the forums is listed below, together with the attendance at each:

- Greytown (17 March) – 12 attendees
- Upper Hutt (18 March) – 8 attendees
- Lower Hutt (19 March) – 13 attendees

- Kapiti (26 March) – 30 attendees
 - Island Bay (31 March) – 35 attendees
 - Porirua (1 April)- 20 attendees
 - Wellington (2 April) – 80 attendees
- The forums started with a presentation by Cr Glensor, covering the benefits of public transport, current services and costs, who pays, recent improvements and current commitments. Then, using an Excel spreadsheet which allowed the rating impact of possible transport scenarios and options to be tested, Cr Glensor discussed with the audience what we could provide in the future – with the financial implications.

4. Review findings

4.1 What went well

- The audiences responded positively and with a high degree of interest. We subsequently received several requests for the presentation.
- The transport model was well received and allowed the public to see the rating impacts of options. It clearly showed the financial impact of the public’s transport aspirations and highlighted the tension between increased service levels and affordability.
- Councillor Glensor’s chairmanship and knowledge of the subject matter was excellent. GW received some very complementary emails about his performance, such as:
 - *“I would like to pass on my personal thanks to you for a wonderful presentation last night....Many people use PowerPoint but don’t know how to speak to it....Your style filled in the gaps and told anyone who couldn’t read or see the presentation a full summary as to what was being shown”*
 - *“I think you did a terrific job of fielding a range of accusations and genuine questions, and showed great patience with a crowd who at times threatened to boycott your presentation altogether!”*
- A number of city and district councillors attended the meetings, some saying that they had found them very informative. Local GW councillors also attended some meetings. The councillor-community mix was valuable.
- The informal style of the forums was popular.

- Questions from the floor were wide-ranging and provided us with a grounding on what is important to people and an insight into the effectiveness of our communication on transport issues.

4.2 What needs improvement

- There were initial organisational teething problems, such as the venue arrangements. Some of the venues were less than ideal. However, by developing checklists and double checking everything, the later meetings went well.
- The meeting times (6.30 pm start) were not always appropriate. For example, a 6.30pm start in Kapiti does not allow public transport users or car commuters to get home from work, eat and attend a meeting. The start time of the Kapiti meeting was pushed back to 7.00pm in response to community feedback. Conversely, in Wellington City an earlier start time may have been more appropriate.
- Advertising of the meetings was not as effective as it should have been. This may have accounted for the variability in attendance. Part of this was because of time constraints but we could have used existing community groups better. We need to think carefully about whom we invite to such forums and how we are going to issue invitations. Once again, this improved as the meetings went on.
- The audiences were generally very pro public transport and were not representative of the community as a whole. They had very high expectations of new and improved services. The cost implications shown in the model did not detract from their enthusiasm for improvements.
- Names and contact information for attendees were not collected. This would have provided us with a valuable contacts database for transport issues.

4.3 Other issues

- This was the first time that Greater Wellington had run forums of this nature. It was a learning experience. However, in order to engage better with the community, provision for some staff specialisation in community/stakeholder relationships may be required.
- The forums were Greater Wellington inviting the community to engage, rather than the other way round.
- The subject matter was ambitious and the model took a considerable amount of staff time and effort. As the forums were unplanned, other planned work was delayed.
- Requests by other organisations to participate in the meetings were turned down, keeping it to Greater Wellington issues only.

- The number of attendees varied across the region. Larger audiences changed the dynamics of the events as they became less intimate. However, most people should have left the forums feeling that they had an opportunity to contribute to, and learn about, the public transport challenges facing Greater Wellington. Even those forums with a relatively low attendance should have had some sort of chain reaction impact.
- The transport Excel spreadsheet was popular and could be used for other Greater Wellington issues, for example, parks, water supply, flood protection, etc.

4.4 Future opportunities

The general feedback was that these forums were successful and worthwhile and should be repeated. A suggested approach for the future is as follows:

- We select one or two key strategic issues facing the Council as part of our LTCCP cycle as subject matter for future community forums, for example, renewable energy. The issues chosen would interest the community and Greater Wellington would benefit from the community feedback.
- We prepare interactive presentations for each of these issues.
- In addition to arranging some community meetings for the general public, we also contact existing community groups offering them the “suite” of Greater Wellington forum topics and suggesting that they issue an invitation to us if they are interested in any of the subjects. This “pull” rather than “push” approach may allow us to reach a wider audience. It would, however, be resource intensive. It may be that such meetings are carried out as part of the LTCCP process, that is, every three years.
- The skill of the presenter was critical to the success of the forums. It is essential that future presenters have the necessary skills.
- Greater Wellington consults the community on a wide range of topics through formal statutory consultation processes, for example, Regional Policy Statement, Regional Pest Management Strategy, Park Management Plans etc. These engagement forums are a new mode of community engagement; they should not be “consultation” for compliance purposes, but Greater Wellington engaging in a “conversation” with the community to inform our strategic thinking.

5. Conclusion

The transport forums were well received and the “having a conversation with the community” approach proved to be an effective mode of engagement. Although not reaching a large audience, the quality of the engagement was

high. In the future, such forums would add a valuable dimension to Greater Wellington's communications and engagement programme.

6. Communications

No separate communication is required at this stage.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***
3. ***Considers the suggested approach.***

Report prepared by:

Report approved by:

Jane Bradbury
Divisional Manager,
Corporate and Strategy

David Benham
CEO