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Committee Economic Wellbeing  
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## Wairarapa Public Transport Review

### 1. Purpose

To report on progress with the Wairarapa Public Transport Review, and to make some decisions regarding the bus component of the review.

### 2. Significance of the decision

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking into account the Council's significance policy and decision-making guidelines. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have medium significance.

The matters requiring decision will have a moderate to major impact on a small number of residents and ratepayers.

Bus route and service level changes have had a history of generating public concern within the region.

### 3. The decision making process

Officers have taken into account the principles set out in section 14 of the Act and the need to manage the Council's resources prudently.

Officers advise that there is no process for making this decision explicitly set out in the Local Government Act 2002 or any other enactment.

### 4. Options

Through public extensive consultation, surveying of public transport users, and discussions with the review's reference group and transport operators Officers consider all options available have been appropriately identified and assessed.

## **5. Community views and preferences**

### **5.1 Reference group**

A reference group comprising representatives of the three territorial councils, the two transport operators, and Cr McPhee from Greater Wellington has guided the study.

The group are in general agreement with the changes proposed in this paper.

### **5.2 Public consultation**

Public consultation occurred in two stages. The first stage, which involved widespread general consultation, took place in July 2011.

The second round took place in January/February this year, and asked for views on various specific bus proposals. Those who made submissions in the first round of consultation were sent a letter outlining the proposed changes, and asking for comments. Notices were also handed out to passengers on the affected buses.

Eight responses, all from individuals, were received to the second round of consultation. They mostly supported the proposed introduction of the new services (in Masterton and Greytown), and opposed the proposed reduction in services (on route 200 between Masterton and Featherston).

## **6. Background**

The Wairarapa review is part of the rolling programme of reviews undertaken by Council. The Wairarapa review began in 2011. The review covered bus and rail services, but because of the complicated nature of some of the rail issues the review was split into a bus and a rail component. This paper addresses the outcome of the bus component of the review, and updates the Committee regarding the rail component.

At its meeting in November 2011, this Committee was advised of the bus proposals arising from the review. It was agreed that the proposals be the subject of a further round of targeted consultation in January/February. This has now been completed.

The final proposals are outlined below.

## **7. Bus proposals**

### **7.1 Masterton town service**

Masterton currently has a weekday service providing four trips per day on three routes.

It is proposed to do the following in Masterton:

- Introduce a fourth route, to cover the east side of Masterton around the Cameron Crescent area

- Reduce the number of services per route from the current four to three
- Slightly change some of the routes to ensure some newly developed facilities (e.g. a health centre, retirement village, and shopping centre) are covered by a bus route.

A proposed new timetable has been agreed with the operator, and planning for bus-stop installation has commenced.

The proposed new timetable is shown in **Attachment 1**.

The suggested changes have widespread local support. The new route addresses an obvious gap in services in Masterton. And the reduction in services from four to three per day reflects the poor patronage numbers on the last run of the day, which is the only service not eligible for SuperGold Card users.

No changes have been made to those outlined in the final consultation proposal.

Patronage in 2010/11 on the Masterton routes was at an all-time high, and up by 9.5% on the previous year.

There is a small saving in the cost to Greater Wellington of providing the proposed new Masterton timetable. The current 12 services per day are provided with one vehicle, and the one vehicle can still provide all the proposed services (and it is still proposed to provide 12 services per day, but now spread over four routes rather than three).

It is suggested the changes be implemented as soon as possible (1 June is the target date).

A new separate Masterton town paper timetable is currently being designed (currently all Wairarapa public transport services are shown on a single timetable). The current paper timetable is quite cluttered and therefore it is proposed to split the current timetable into two.

## **7.2 Greytown – Woodside service**

Currently only **peak** train services stopping at Woodside station are met by a bus service to Greytown (Woodside station is 5km from Greytown). There is no connecting bus service for off-peak and weekend services.

It is proposed that extra services be provided to connect with all weekday off-peak trains and all Saturday trains. It is not proposed to provide a connection to the late night Friday trains - patronage on connections to this service at other stations is extremely low (see proposal below for further detail on these).

The cost of the existing bus service is relatively high, at a gross cost of \$60,000. The net cost is difficult to determine, because most passengers don't pay a fare – this service is part of the “Wairarapa Plus” scheme, and as such is free to passengers holding a monthly rail pass (which is most bus passengers).

About 10,000 passenger trips are made on the service (this number has been steady over recent years). The bus service is very much an extension of the rail network – all passengers on the service are either going to, or coming from, the Wellington train.

The cost of expanding the bus service is also likely to be at a high cost to Greater Wellington. At the time of writing the new bus contract price is currently being negotiated with the provider of the current service, but any extra cost is expected to be covered by reductions in other Wairarapa services (see below).

The proposed expanded service is strongly supported by the local community.

The service proposed in this paper is different to that which was included in the final round of consultation. The consultation suggested that buses would also meet all Sunday trains. However the subsequent costing exercise has found that the inclusion of Sunday services would cost more than savings found from reducing services elsewhere in the area. Consequently, because the review has to be cost-neutral, the proposal to have Sunday connections has had to be dropped.

The proposed new timetable is shown in **Attachment 2**.

Following satisfactory negotiation with the bus operator, implementation of 1 June is suggested.

### **7.3 Masterton to Featherston (and Martinborough) service**

The most contentious issue with the review is the proposal to reduce the weekend bus service between Featherston (with connections to Martinborough) and Masterton. Three return trips per day are run on the weekends.

The weekend contract costs \$132,000 a year to operate, and last year carried 8,400 passengers. This equates to a subsidy of about \$16 per passenger trip. The average fare paid on this service is estimated to be about \$3.

While it is not appropriate to measure Wairarapa bus services against typical Wellington services<sup>1</sup>, this level of subsidy is never-the-less not sustainable. It had been hoped that the bus service could continue in anticipation that extra weekend train services (currently being investigated) might be introduced. If extra train services could be introduced there would be little need for what would be a parallel bus service and the bus service could have been terminated at the same time the new train services were introduced.

However at this stage it seems that any extra weekend train services will be very expensive to provide, and thus are unlikely to be introduced in the near future. Thus a decision on the bus service is needed now.

The options regarding the weekend bus service include:

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<sup>1</sup> Wairarapa services are largely "social" in nature, and because of the width of the fare zones compared to Wellington, the services tend to have lower revenue and cost recovery levels and high subsidy per passenger levels

- delete the service altogether
- reduce the number of trips from three to two on each day
- operate only on Saturday or Sunday.

Deleting the service altogether will be very unpopular with the local community, and there are other options that should be considered before complete deletion.

Reducing the number of trips is difficult, with only three services per day (all of which are equally popular). Deleting the middle service, the most likely candidate for deletion, would leave a large gap between services.

Reducing the service to only one day at the weekend appears the best option. Saturday is the more popular of the two days, and hopefully many of the Sunday travellers will change to Saturday, providing a boost to patronage. But the reduced service should be closely monitored, and if it does not improve it should also end.

Reducing the weekend service to one day will result in sufficient cost savings to fund the extension of the Greytown-Woodside service.

The deletion of the Sunday service will mean that the buses between Martinborough and Featherston on Sunday will also cease. These buses connect with the weekend trains. It should be noted however that retaining all Saturday services will ensure access of Martinborough residents to the rest of Wairarapa and Wellington, and will allow visitors from Wellington to access Martinborough, on one day of the weekend.

It is also planned to delete the two late night Friday buses between Martinborough and Featherston which connect with the late night Friday trains in Featherston. Patronage on these services is very low, and the buses often carry no-one.

There is strong local support for a continuation of both the Saturday and Sunday bus services. But the second round of consultation made it clear that it was unlikely that the weekend bus services could continue. The consultation indicated that it was hoped to continue the buses until a possible increase in weekend train services, but if the extra train services were to be delayed for any reason, or not eventuate, the bus services would have to be deleted.

While there were a few submissions opposing the reduction in service, most seem to accept that the numbers do not justify a full seven day-a-week service.

## **8. Costs**

There are no additional costs arising from the review – the changes to the bus services are designed to be cost-neutral (on a Wairarapa wide basis).

## 9. Trial

The new services are introduced on a trial basis. Draft evaluation criteria have been drawn up and will be used to assess the services. Those services which do not meet the criteria will not be continued.

A copy of the draft evaluation criteria are attached as **Attachment 3**. Work is still being undertaken on the criteria, the development of which is complicated by the unavailability of the basic data required. It is suggested that the Committee Chair be given delegated authority to approve the criteria once they have been completed.

## 10. Rail update

While the bus component of the review has been separated from the rail component, as can be seen above the bus and rail services are often inter-linked. It is therefore useful to consider the current situation with the review of the rail service.

A number of rail changes are being considered as part of the review. These include addressing the capacity problems faced by the Wairarapa train service, and the possible introduction of extra weekend services. Because these changes are likely to have cost implications, specific costings for the potential changes have been sought from KiwiRail. These have been received and are currently being analysed. Further discussions with KiwiRail are being organised to discuss the costs and their implications.

## 11. Communication

Communications of all the bus changes will be made. It will be important to advertise the new services and give them a chance to succeed – many comments were received during the review that people did not know that a service existed. The “use it or lose it” message should also be used.

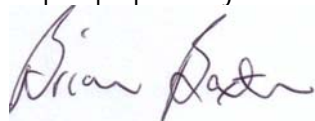
## 12. Recommendations

*That the Committee:*

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*
3. *Agrees that subject to there being no overall cost implications and subject to satisfactory agreement of contractual terms with the current bus operator, to the following changes:*
  - *provide Masterton bus services as per the timetable attached*
  - *provide Greytown bus services as per the timetable attached*

- *reduce the weekend services between Masterton, Featherston, and Martinborough to Saturday only*
  - *delete the two late night Friday bus services between Featherston and Martinborough*
7. ***Agrees*** that new services be provided on a trial basis, and ***notes*** that evaluation criteria are being drawn up which will be used to decide the future of the services
  8. ***Agrees*** to delegate to the Chair of this Committee authority to approve the evaluation criteria
  9. ***Notes*** that discussions with KiwiRail are continuing regarding possible changes to rail services.

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**Attachment 1:** Proposed Masterton bus timetable

**Attachment 2:** Proposed Greytown – Woodside bus timetable

**Attachment 3:** Success Evaluation Criteria