

By email

14 November 2024

Mayor Tory Whanau
Wellington City Council
Tory.Whanau@wcc.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou

WCC Long Term Plan Transport Projects

We understand your Council is considering an LTP Amendment in 2025, which may impact the funding of a number of capital projects. As the Public Transport Authority for the region, we wanted to provide our Council's views on those projects which have a direct impact on public transport to assist you in your deliberations. We have identified three upcoming projects which have a direct impact on public transport – the Golden Mile improvements; Harbour Quays and Eastern Bus Corridor Targeted Improvements.

For context, the city has seen considerable growth in bus patronage over the last few years and is now at a higher overall level of patronage than pre-Covid. Total bus boardings in 2023-24 were 26.1 million, an increase of 17.4% on the previous year. This is a really good news story for the city that is contributing to reducing congestion levels and emissions. Greater Wellington has made provision for an increase in bus vehicle numbers and service levels to respond to this growth. However, we also need to improve the corridors on which these services run, otherwise we will get increased bus on bus congestion, reduced reliability and satisfaction, which will have the opposite effect on patronage as well as increasing operational costs.

The key corridors we are most concerned about are: Hutt Road/Thorndon Quay; Golden Mile and the No2 route from the City to the Eastern Suburbs. These are the busiest routes on our network, carrying the majority of our services and carrying up to 70,000 people into and out of the central city every weekday. A study undertaken this year has shown that the Golden Mile (which currently carries 92% of Wellington City bus routes) will reach capacity for buses within 12-24 months and unless additional capacity is provided will result in incrementally slower and less reliable bus journeys, with maximum saturation experienced within the next 4-5 years. The Harbour Quays project aims to provide an alternative bus route for some services, to reduce the load on the Golden Mile, through the provision of a low-cost bus lane. Improvements on the Golden Mile itself, including rationalisation of stops, new shelters and restrictions on other vehicles will also greatly assist in maintaining a high-quality service for Wellingtonians and commuters.

On the No 2 Route, our busiest route with 3.6 million boardings per annum, Greater Wellington has made the decision to improve capacity through the purchase of an initial 5 electric articulated buses, ramping up to 19 articulated buses in time. These are due to come into service in 2026. To enable these to run safely some targeted corridor improvements are required from the city centre to the eastern suburbs. There are also some excellent benefits to be gained for journey times from some modest intersection improvements along this route.

We understand the budget constraints that your Council faces through the proposed LTP Amendment and the difficult choices that will have to be made – GW is working in a similarly constrained financial context. We would however like to reiterate that these three projects are all critical infrastructure projects to maintain and improve the city’s public transport services on which Wellingtonians rely – they are not ‘nice to have’s’. As a consequence, Greater Wellington advocates for:

1. Priority focus on the Harbour Quays and Eastern Bus Corridor;
2. Retention of public transport improvements along the Hutt Road – Thorndon Quay; and
3. Continue with agreed Courtenay Place upgrades with the remainder of the Golden Mile improvements deferred as currently planned in your recent Long-term Plan.

As WCC is the Road Controlling Authority, we are reliant on the decisions you make, however to recognise the shared benefits of these projects, Greater Wellington has made provision in our LTP to co-fund 50% of the costs of Harbour Quays and Eastern Bus Corridor Targeted Improvements, as well as fund the provision of new bus shelters on the Golden Mile. This is the first time we have as a PTA co-funded significant assets owned by a territorial authority and recognises the importance we place on the successful delivery of these projects. We are committed to working collaboratively with your officers on the planning and delivery of these projects and a joint management structure and project team has already been established. The Golden Mile and Harbour Quays route are part of a package and have been conceptualised and designed with each other in mind and will together once complete result in more bus stops, with more bus shelter, serving more people than at present in the central city.

We urge councillors to recognise the considerable benefits of these projects to the future success of the city and to maintain funding for them in the current triennium.

Ngā mihi



Daran Ponter
Chair

Copy: WCC Councillors
GWRC Councillors