



Submission on Proposed changes to Wellington City Buses

Prepared by the Houghton Valley Progressive Association on behalf of Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate Residents on 23 March 2012

Executive Summary

Metlink is undertaking a review of Wellington City buses and has asked for submissions from individuals and community groups on the proposed changes outlined in the “What do you think” consultation document and on the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) website.

It is our understanding that the bus review has been initiated because there is a peak congestion problem in the CBD and many of the services are not cost effective at off-peak times. Also, Metlink is aiming to move large buses off some of the steep/narrow roads and introduce smaller buses, especially during the off-peak.

Our view is that an integrated approach is required to planning public transportation in the Wellington area. The effectiveness of a “hub type” bus system is likely to be highly dependent on the development of a rapid light rail system from the Railway Station through to Newtown and this is still under investigation. It is our view that major changes to the bus system should not be made until the investigation into the light rail system has been completed.

While most of the residents in Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate recognise that some of the current bus services are inefficient and a review of those services is appropriate, they strongly oppose the current proposal for the Houghton Valley / Melrose/ Southgate area, which would result in a substantial reduction in services.

Our specific concerns are outlined in this submission including: the reduction (and in some case elimination of services); significantly longer travel times to the CBD; and the need to transfer to other buses at off-peak times.

The Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate community would like to work with the GWRC to explore ways of improving the current system to make it more efficient and effective for current and potential bus users across Wellington, including our community.

In particular we would like to explore with you the possibility of extending the proposed A2 route from Newtown to Houghton Bay. Although this would mean the trolley bus infrastructure would not be utilised between Constable St and Newtown Park Zoo, our view is that this proposal is worth serious consideration because it would open up a wider range of options to provide a more frequent service with much better coverage for the Melrose / Houghton Valley / Southgate area than the current proposal, while also reducing the number of buses going into the CBD. (A similar option could be discussed with the Mairangi / Wilton / Wadestown community for that end). Our proposal is discussed in more detail in section 5 of this submission.

1.0 Background

Daran Ponter and Paul Bruce from the Greater Wellington Regional Council gave a presentation on the proposed changes for the Southern Suburbs in a meeting held at the Houghton Valley School Hall on Monday 19 March, which was attended by approximately 45 people from the Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate area.

This submission has been prepared by the Houghton Valley Progressive Association based on the views expressed by local residents at the meeting and written comments provided subsequently.

The submission outlines:

- Residents' comments on the review process followed by Metlink.
- The proposed changes to the bus routes, and reduction in services and identification of the groups of people in the Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate area that are likely to be most affected.
- The implications of those changes.
- Proposals by the residents of Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate.

2.0 Comments on the review process

We support reviewing the bus service given that it has grown incrementally and it is at least 20 years since the last review. However, the bus review needs to be undertaken alongside a wider integrated review of public transport in the Wellington area, including the proposal for a rapid light rail system between the Railway Station and Wellington Hospital (using the Jervois-Taranaki/Cambridge Tce link). It appears that the effectiveness of a "hub type" bus system would be highly dependent on the implementation of the light rail system to transport people rapidly between transfer points and the CBD.

Our view is that major changes to the bus system should not be progressed any further until the possibility of a light rail system has been fully investigated. Before changing to a "hub type" bus system a full scale integrated ticketing system would also need to be in place.

We have some specific concerns about the lack of evidence and process underpinning the bus review:

- The review draws on Snapper data indicating bus usage patterns, but the data has not been made publicly available by Go Wellington and given their reluctance to share the data the changes proposed appear to be highly arbitrary. In addition, the data showing off-peak bus travel by pensioners using Gold passes is incomplete – their travel is recorded by the bus driver as the passenger alights but not when they disembark, so there is no information about where they have travelled to and the length of their journey. We recommend that Go Wellington fully records the actual usage of the services over a 12 month period (summer and winter) and makes the data available to local stakeholders as part of the review process.
- We have also not seen any data on traffic flows, which have a major impact on travelling times. The length of time taken to travel on the proposed routes has not been estimated and a value has not been placed on the additional time this would impose on bus users.
- There doesn't appear to be detailed designs and costings for the infrastructure facilities, including shelters, required at major transfer points. Our understanding is that around \$500,000 has been set aside to cover infrastructure for 6-7 hubs and this is likely to be grossly inadequate.

- Metlink claim that 78% more people would be within a 10 minute walk of a bus stop compared to 58% at present, and that the number of bus trips would increase by 15%. The increase in bus trips appears overstated because it is based on population numbers without fully taking into account:
 - The reduction in usage by existing passengers adversely affected by the changes (many of whom would no longer be living on a bus route and many who would have to make transfers).
 - People not currently using the buses have already established alternative modes of transport and consequently those who would be within a 10 minute walk of a bus stop may not automatically use the new bus service.
- We therefore question whether Metlink would in fact achieve the overall benefits it is claiming in terms of increased patronage of the Wellington bus service. In the Houghton Valley/Melrose/ Southgate area these benefits would not be realised. Instead there would be significant costs for this community.
- A comprehensive review of the bus system should also include a review of the vehicle fleet taking into account the significant increase in oil prices forecasted by the International Energy Agency. This has implications for the composition of the bus fleet and is likely to make retention of some electric trolley buses extremely worthwhile. In the longer term, it could also significantly increase the demand for public transport, including bus services.
- The “hubbing” approach to bus services may be efficient in a city which is relatively flat with a grid pattern roading network, but does not appear to be appropriate, in the form proposed, given the hilly terrain in Wellington and the absence of a rapid light rail system, which is a feature in many cities where it seems to work well.

3.0 Changes to bus routes / reduction in services

The following is a brief summary of our understanding of the proposed changes:

- **During peak times** (7-9am and 4-6pm) the 32 would replace the 22 and 23. The 32 would travel in a clockwise direction from Southgate to Houghton Bay/ Island Bay/Adelaide Rd and into the CBD where it would travel along Customhouse/Waterloo Quay to the Railway Station. The frequency would be every 12 minutes in the morning peak time and every 20 minutes from 4-6pm. It is not clear whether the 32 would be an express (or any of the buses on the Island Bay A1 route) which would add considerable time to the journey.
- **All day services, including off-peak times** (weekdays 6am-12am, Sat-Sun 7am-10pm) - smaller shuttle buses would be on the Southern shopper route (the 29). It would operate at 30 minute intervals in both directions on weekdays and at 60 minute intervals on the weekend. Passengers would need to change buses either in Island Bay or Wellington Hospital when going to the CBD. The fare would be the same if they make the change within 30 minutes. (In our view a changeover period of two hours would be more realistic to cover missed buses, dense traffic and other delays).

3.1 Reduced Services

Under the proposed changes a number of heavily populated streets (and the side streets connecting to these) would receive no peak bus service, and some streets would no longer have any bus service, at any time of the day or night.

- The 32 would not go along View Rd (which is covered by the 23 at present). Note that some years ago the bus route was changed from Houghton Bay Rd to View Rd because it is more densely populated.
- There would be no service at all along upper upper Rintoul St /Lavaud St / Russell Tce/ Mt Albert Rd through to Buckley Rd, which would significantly affect people living in Volga St and people travelling to the National Hockey Stadium and adjacent Basketball Gymnasium at the Chinese Cultural Centre. (This area is currently on route 22).
- The 32 and 29 would not go to the Southern end of Buckley Rd i.e. Orchy Cres (which is currently on route 22). This area is extremely exposed to bad weather from both the North and South.
- The 32 would not cover Hornsey Rd and Manchester St i.e. no peak service in this area which is currently on route 23. These people would have an extremely long walk to Houghton Bay Rd, Lyall Bay or Newtown to catch a bus at peak time. (This could be up to 20-30 minutes depending on their location)
- People from Cave Rd and the Esplanade would need to walk to Hungerford Rd to catch the 29 at off-peak time. This area is also very exposed to weather from the South.
- While the Lyall Bay bus service (nos. 15 and 36) is an alternative for people living in View Rd South and Hungerford Rd, this would become a secondary route and the frequency would be greatly reduced.
- There would be no peak bus service to any part of Rintoul St, along which are located Wakefield Hospital, Village in the Park Hospital and Rest Home, Little Wonders Childcare and a large complex of council flats. People working early shifts at these hospitals would have to catch the 29 shuttle bus and transfer to a bus on the A1 at Island Bay.

3.2 Extended Travel Times

- We estimate that the peak 32 service could take **up to an hour** to get into the CBD from Buckley Rd in the morning. Likewise it could take around an hour to get to Cave Rd (via Southgate) on the return journey from the CBD. (As an indicator, there has been a school bus on part of this route in the morning with a scheduled time of 50 minutes just to get to the Basin Reserve).
- It currently takes **35 minutes** to travel from Cave Rd on the Houghton Bay bus (23) to the northern end of Lambton Quay. Similarly, it takes around 35 minutes to travel from Southgate into the CBD. (The estimated travel time is **25 minutes longer each way**). This

would undoubtedly deter current passengers on the 22 and 23 from using the peak 32 service.

- It would take much longer to travel to and from the CBD during off-peak times due to the transfer at Wellington Hospital or Island Bay. If a transfer is missed the waiting time could be 30-40mins.

4.0 Implications of the proposed changes

- Our community is particularly vulnerable to the proposed reduction, and in some cases elimination, of bus services because there are no local shops and services in the area.
- Direct access to the CBD is important. Many of us have bought homes in the area because they are on a bus route /close proximity to a bus stop and convenient to the CBD. What was a convenient journey of up to 35 minutes at peak times could take 60 minutes on the 32 and longer at off-peak times on the 29 if we miss a connection.
- At peak times, Customhouse/Waterloo Quay already suffers from traffic congestion and there are likely to be considerable delays, combined with lack of shelter and difficulty crossing 6 lanes to get to a bus stop to catch the 32 back from the CBD.
- Direct access to schools is also important. There has been a school bus in the morning from Houghton Bay / Southgate that goes to Island Bay, South Wellington Intermediate and to the Basin Reserve (Wellington High School, Wellington East and Wellington Boys). These students currently get the 22 and 23 home, which enables them to participate in after school activities. Parents need to be able to travel directly from the CBD in the afternoon to meet their children after school.
- There are also a number of children travelling to schools on the Eastern side (i.e. Rongotai College, St Patricks College, St Catherines, Evans Bay Intermediate) and their transport requirements need to be taken into account.
- Change to the 29 and 32 bus routes would result in many people having to walk considerable distances to bus stops. The hilly terrain and weather conditions do not appear to have been taken into account and the impact on the elderly, people with young children and disabilities. These people will also be affected by the need to make transfers from the 29 at Wellington Hospital or Island Bay.
- It appears that few, if any, Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate residents would benefit from the shuttle providing a link to Brooklyn during the off-peak as the main shopping centres are Newtown and Kilbirnie, to which more direct access has not been provided.
- It would be more difficult for those starting work early or late and for people to get to and from work or school, the university and other activities, especially on the weekend and in the evenings. For security reasons it is not desirable to be changing buses in Newtown late at night.
- After 10pm in the weekend evenings there is no connection proposed from the core service to Houghton Valley / Melrose/ Southgate. Most Saturday evening social activities finish after

10pm. It will make for an expensive evening if you have to catch a taxi home from Newtown or Island Bay.

- Overall we find the hub concept to be a problem due to the extended time to get anywhere, inconvenience, crowds, security and lack of shelter from the weather. It does not appear feasible to have a hub outside Wellington Hospital where there is limited space and already considerable traffic congestion. It would undoubtedly be expensive to create hub shelters and seating.
- Bus fares are already relatively expensive and it is our understanding that Wellington City fares are being used to subsidise transport in the wider Wellington region. Although it is claimed fares would remain the same, the level of service in the Houghton Valley / Melrose area would be drastically reduced tilting the balance more towards private transport and increased use of cars at peak and off peak times.
- We want to maintain a good public transport system for environmental reasons. There is a high risk that if the services are reduced many people will take cars or taxis either directly into town or to link to a bus service in Island Bay, Newtown or Kilbirnie, where there is already very little parking. Some people have indicated that they would have little option but to purchase a second car at considerable expense.
- The bus services are being significantly reduced, although the buses are already full at peak times. Furthermore, the number of young families in the area appears to be growing based on the increasing rolls at both the Houghton Valley Play Centre and School, indicating more people and not less could be using the bus service in the future.

5.0 Proposals by the residents of Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate

In our view, a robust case based on sound evidence and analysis has not been made for switching from the status quo. We strongly oppose the current proposal for the Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate area. We understand our community has similar concerns to the community in Wilton / Wadestown (at the other end of the 22/23 bus route) and other communities in outer Wellington suburbs, such as Strathmore and Johnsonville / Churton Park.

Our preferred option is to explore ways of improving the current system to make it more efficient and effective for current and potential bus users across Wellington, including the Houghton Valley / Melrose community.

Direct and timely access to the CBD at peak and off peak is important for the people in this community. We therefore suggest:

- Extending the proposed A2 route from Newtown to Houghton Bay. This could increase the frequency of service into the CBD, particularly at peak times. However, this would mean switching the trolley bus run to Newtown Zoo to diesel. We acknowledge that some people may oppose this on environmental grounds, but on balance this would still be worth serious consideration for the following reasons:
 - The A2 is a high frequency spur from Constable St ending abruptly at Newtown and leading nowhere beyond that.

- Extending the A2 would open up a range of options to provide a more frequent service with much better coverage for the Melrose / Houghton Bay / Southgate area.
- One option for instance, through extending the A2 from Newtown is that a service could operate which combines the 22 and 23 at more regular times (maybe every 15 minutes at peak times and every 30 minutes at off peak times). While potentially making the trip longer for those using the service, it would enable a more regular service for all those in the community. (Currently the 22 and 23 run within a short space of each other and then there is a big gap until the next 22 and 23). It would also reduce the number of buses going into the CBD. A similar option could be discussed with the Mairangi / Wilton /Wadestown community for that end.
- In addition to this, another possibility is to divert a bus at from Riddiford St on the A2 along Russell Terrace past the Hockey Stadium through to Southgate. (The viability of this would depend on bus usage patterns).
- It is important to retain direct services from the CBD to Houghton Bay and Southgate, not only from 7-9am and 4-6pm, but also in the early morning and mid-afternoon on weekdays and evenings to provide a services for:
 - Children and parents to get home after school and work. Specifically the 23 which currently leaves Lambton Quay at 2.40pm and the 23 which departs from Courtenay Place at 3.25pm.
 - People who need to leave before 7am to start work either en route to the CBD or in the CBD before 7.30am.
 - People working late from around 6-9pm.
 - People who have been out in the evening in the CBD (e.g. at the movies) so they can get home safely without transferring in Newtown. Current services depart from the Railway Station around 10.20pm and 11.20pm. These buses go past the zoo to Melrose and Southgate with a diversion to Houghton Bay on request and it seems to work fairly well.
- At peak times we suggest limiting the minimum number of stages passengers may travel to reduce the number of passengers alighting between Lambton Quay and Courtenay Place. This would reduce the possibility of Houghton Valley /Melrose/Southgate passengers being left behind.
- We acknowledge that during off-peak times smaller buses may be more cost effective depending on the level of patronage.
- If the 32 is introduced at peak times to replace the 22 and 23 , which we strongly recommend against, then we suggest that it goes along View Rd as there are more people living there than in the Valley. Some people have suggested that this could be an express bus from Island Bay onwards and similarly on the return journey from the CBD. While this may reduce the travel time a little, it would still take much longer than the current 23 and

22services, so the level of patronage would be likely to fall considerably. It is also unclear how an express service could accommodate people travelling to work in Newtown for instance, at Wakefield Hospital and Wellington Hospital

6.0 Conclusion

The proposed changes in bus services to the Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate suburbs are unacceptable in their current form due to the significant reduction in services and the negative impact that would have on the well-being of our community, particularly its most vulnerable residents. If the proposals went ahead unchanged, there would be a significant decrease in bus patronage and an associated increase in the number of cars being driven to neighbouring suburbs where bus hubs were located and into the CBD.

Our preferred option is to explore ways of improving the current system to make it more efficient and effective for all current and future bus users in Wellington.

Overall, we are not against change if it improves the situation and we understand that some routes are not cost effective and that the city is crowded with buses. However, in our view a lot more research is required into which routes and services cause problems and to develop feasible solutions that meet the needs of current and future bus users in all Wellington communities, including those in the outer suburbs.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission. We trust that careful consideration will be made of our concerns about the proposed new bus service and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the Council on a revised service that is acceptable to the Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate community.

Contact

Christine Fowler

President, Houghton Valley Progressive Association

Ph. (04) 934 7365 (Home); (04) 816 2864 (Work)

Email: bfowler@paradise.net.nz