

Submission May 2014

Proposed Changes to Wellington Buses

**Prepared by the Houghton Valley Progressive Association on behalf of
Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate Residents with support from
Newtown, Berhampore and Mount Cook Residents**

Executive Summary

Metlink is continuing the review of Wellington City buses and has asked for submissions from individuals and community groups on the proposed changes outlined in the second consultation document 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 use larger buses and possibly double deckers in the CBD and smaller buses on feeder routes and during the off-peak.

Our view is that an integrated approach is required to planning public transportation in the Wellington area. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) proposal relies on successful completion of the Basin Flyover, duplication of the Mt Victoria Tunnel and associated road widening to maintain consistent arrival and departure times. However, these projects still have a level of uncertainty and it would be premature to make any decisions about city buses until this outcome is known.

While most of the residents in Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate recognise that some of the issues we raised in our last submission have been addressed (i.e. the frequency of off-peak services) there are still some significant issues that need to be worked through. We would therefore appreciate the opportunity to discuss and investigate the following issues in more depth with the GWRC:

- We need more than 3 direct services to the CBD to meet the weekday peak and want to discuss frequency and timing. The route via Courtenay Place to and from the Railway Station needs to be confirmed.
- We also require transport for school children (i.e. from the Basin Reserve in the afternoon).
- We would like to explore the possibility of a late night service on weekdays evenings and weekends to address the needs of shift workers and people attending the movies, meetings and evening classes.
- The continuation of the Lyall Bay service to the terminus at Hungerford Rd needs to be confirmed. Further consideration should be given to links between the Southern Suburbs and the Eastern Suburbs to provide residents with access to the Kilbrinie

Shops, Rongotai retail precinct, intermediate and secondary schools and sporting facilities.

- A direct link to the university from Houghton Bay should be investigated during the off-peak travelling via Taranaki St and the Southern end of the Terrace to the university. (There is wide support for this proposal from Houghton Bay, Melrose, Southgate, Newtown and Mount Cook residents).
- Where transfers are required, connections need to be timely and consistent with sufficient capacity in connecting buses for transferring passengers.
- At the Newtown hub (outside the hospital) it will be essential to have shelters of sufficient quality to meet Wellington weather conditions, adequate seating and infrastructure (including toilet facilities).
- We have some significant concerns about the lack of security in the evenings at the Newtown hub given the lack of “live” shop frontages in the area.
- When transfers are made, the GWRC has indicated that the fare would remain the same if the change is made within 30 minutes. We propose that a changeover period of two hours would be more realistic to cover missed buses, dense traffic and other delays.

This submission outlines:

- Background on our previous submission and consultation
- Comments on the review process
- A brief summary of the GRWC’s latest proposal
- The implications of the proposed changes
- Areas requiring further consultation and investigation.

1.0 Background

Previous submission

Metlink began a review of the Wellington City buses in 2012 and the Houghton Valley Progressive Association made a submission in March 2012 on the changes proposed to the services in the Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate area (i.e. the 23 and 22 services). Our specific concerns outlined in the submission included: the reduction (and in some cases elimination of services); significantly longer travel times to the CBD; and proposed to transfer to other buses. Our submission included suggestions that would make the current service more efficient and effective for current and future bus users across Wellington including our community.

Consultation to date

Over the past two years, the GWRC) has held a public consultation process in which we have participated. Paul Bruce and Daran Ponter, who were on the GRWC at that time, and

council officers held several meetings attended by Houghton Valley, Southgate and Melrose representatives, Linda Cameron and Christine Fowler.

In 2013 we were presented with a revised proposal by the GWRC, which had taken into account some of the recommendations in our submission, notably:

- Direct services to and from Houghton Bay and Southgate to the Wellington CBD would still be provided to meet the demand at peak times and the frequency would remain unchanged.
- An increase in the off-peak frequency of the Houghton Bay and Southgate Services from 60 minutes to 30 minutes.
- The current Houghton Bay route to replace the current A2 route from Constable St to Newtown Zoo. The service was also to be extended to Crofton Downs make it more economic.
- The current service to Island Bay / Houghton Bay Esplanade (32) at peak times to remain unchanged.

A new service was proposed for Southgate which would link Newtown, Southgate, the Island Bay shops, Owhiro Bay and Brooklyn. This would require Southgate passengers travelling to Wellington to change buses at Newtown during the off-peak. Although we had strong reservations about the transfer, the increase in frequency during the off-peak and link to the Island Bay shops was seen by our residents as a positive feature. We also agreed with the proposal to have smaller buses at off-peak times.

It was our understanding that we had reached mutual agreement with the GWRC on the changes outlined above (refer email from Matthew Lear (GWRC) 30 July 2013)

However, Council Officers held another meeting in March 2014 and we were informed that there had been further changes to the GWRC's proposal. The latest proposal varies significantly from what we had understood had been agreed through the consultation process last year.

We have some major concerns about the review and have identified a number of issues with the GWRC's latest proposal that still need to be worked through the consultation process.

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.

The BRT proposal for routes connected to the Hospital hub routes relies on successful completion of the Basin Flyover. This project would help to maintain consistent arrival and departure times from the Newtown Hospital hub. However, the outcome of this project's

resource consent hearing is currently undecided and it would be premature to make any decisions until this outcome is known.

The BRT proposal also relies on the duplication of the Mt Victoria Tunnel and the associated widening of Ruahine St and Wellington Rd through to the Kilbirnie Rd / Wellington Rd signalised intersection. This project would provide more consistent arrival and departure times from the Kilbirnie hub. However, we understand that, both the funding and consent requirements carry a level of uncertainty and their outcome still has to be decided.

Our view is that major changes to the bus system should not be made until these wider Wellington public transportation issues have been resolved. Before changing to a “hub type” bus system a full scale integrated ticketing system would also need to be in place.

Lack of evidence / data

In our previous submission we outlined some specific concerns about the lack of evidence and process underpinning the bus review. Since then, there does not appear to have been any progress in relation to the availability of data. The review draws on Snapper data indicating bus usage patterns and we asked that this be made public to local stakeholders by GO Wellington as part of the review. Given their reluctance to share this information, the changes proposed still appear to be rather arbitrary. The focus seems to be on the number of passengers, but where they have travelled and the length of their journey is also relevant, particularly for the Houghton Bay and Southgate services, given the distance from the Wellington CBD.

Transport expenditure per ward resident

The GWRC has recently upgraded its rail services with the introduction of the Matangi rail units. This expenditure will greatly benefit residents in Wellington City's western and northern suburbs, particularly those residents near to the Johnsonville and Porirua lines. Many of these Wellington residents have access to other transport options in addition to proposed bus services. In contrast, Houghton Bay, Melrose and Southgate residents are dependent on bus services for public transport and given the distance from the CBD, walking and cycling are generally not feasible alternatives.

Similarly, the Mt Victoria duplication and associated Ruahine St-Wellington Rd widening will primarily benefit the eastern suburbs. Again Houghton Bay, Melrose and Southgate residents will be expected to contribute to these transport projects through either rates and/or income taxes but they will receive little public transport benefits.

If the basis of service was allocated on the amount of public transport expenditure per ward resident, it seems clear that under the GWRC's latest bus proposals, Houghton Bay, Melrose and Southgate residents will be receiving a much lower transport benefit/service compared to many other Wellington and Greater Wellington Region residents.

3.0 GWRC's latest proposal

The following is a brief summary of the GRWC's latest proposal (refer GRWC website for more information - <http://www.gw.govt.nz/proposed-wellington-city-bus-network/>)

3.1 Southgate (current 22)

Weekday route 22 and weekend route 23 services to Southgate to be replaced by a new local route that will connect Newtown, Southgate, Island Bay shops Owhiro Bay and Brooklyn with a transfer required at Wellington Hospital for travel to the CBD.

At peak times only three buses are proposed. It appears they will still travel direct via Courtenay Place to and from the Railway Station (although this needs to be confirmed as it is not clear in the proposal). Currently there are six direct buses in the morning and five in the evening peak.

- Weekday peak – every 15 to 30 minutes (current average is every 20 minutes). Only three direct buses proposed,
- Weekday daytime – every 30 minutes (currently hourly). Transfer/timed connection in Newtown for travel to and from Wellington.
- Weekday evening – as now every hour. Transfer/timed connection in Newtown for travel to and from Wellington.
- Saturday – more frequent daytime service every 30 minutes (currently hourly) and evenings as now every hour
- Sunday – buses hourly daytime and evening

The route would change to travel along Russell Terrace to Riddiford St. (Current route is Russell Terrace, Lavaud St, Rintoul St, and Riddiford St).

As most Southgate buses will not travel to the city the use of smaller buses will be considered.

3.2 Houghton Bay (current 23)

Newtown Park Zoo bus (route A2) to be replaced by more frequent Houghton Bay Service. A transfer will be required at the Newtown hub to travel to the CBD during the off-peak.

A significant reduction in service is proposed at peak times with only three buses provided for direct travel to and from the CBD and there will no longer be a direct service to the university. Currently there are seven direct buses during the morning peak and six in the

evening peak between Houghton Bay and the Railway Station (with three to the university in the morning and two from the university in the evening peak).

The route is not clear in the proposal. We have assumed it still be via Courtenay Place to and from the Railway Station (this needs to be confirmed).

- Weekday peak - every 15 minutes (current average is 20 minutes). Only three direct buses to Wellington (currently seven in the morning and six in the evening peak).
- Weekday daytime – every 30 minutes (currently hourly). Transfer/timed connection in Newtown for travel to and from Wellington.
- Weekday evening – hourly as now. Transfer/timed connection in Newtown. (Note - the last bus is at 10pm).
- Saturday every 30 minutes daytime (currently hourly) and hourly in the evening (as now). Transfer/timed connection in Newtown for travel to and from Wellington.
- Sunday – as now buses every 60 minutes daytime with new evening service (last bus now 6.35pm). It is unclear whether a transfer in Newtown is required for travel to and from Wellington.

As most Houghton Bay buses will not travel to the city the use of smaller buses will be considered.

3.3 Esplanade (current 32)

No change proposed to bus hours or days of operation for the Esplanade. Specific bus times and bus size may be adjusted to match capacity with demand.

Possible reduction in frequency - if a higher capacity bus is introduced some closely spaced trips around 7.50am may be combined to help reduce the congestion in the city.

3.4 Lyall Bay Service (current 3 and 6)

It is proposed that fewer buses will serve the southern area of Lyall Bay. Every second daytime bus from Onepu Rd is proposed to branch at Lyall Bay Parade and run to Tirangi Rd to service Rongotai and the retail area.

This will reduce the frequency of the service by at least half during the weekday peak and off-peak and Saturday daytime for residents in Houghton Bay who use the Lyall Bay service to travel to the Kilbirnie shops and the schools in the Eastern suburbs.

The southern end of the route needs to be confirmed. It is not clear whether the Lyall Bay service will continue connect to Hungerford Rd or if it terminates at Rua St / Sutherland drive, this would further isolate Houghton Valley residents.

4.0 The implications of the proposed changes

Direct access, especially during peak times to Wellington CBD is very important for our residents

The lack of community facilities (i.e. shops, intermediate/ secondary schools, entertainment and employment) means that the Houghton Valley /Melrose/ Southgate community is particularly vulnerable to proposed changes in bus services. Lower population density in the area is a result of both topography and the extensive landfill sites in Houghton Bay and Southgate, which have made much of the land unsuited to development. (Many other Wellington suburbs have benefitted from these landfill sites and have been able to develop).

Due to topography and the distance from Wellington alternative options available to some other suburbs (i.e. cycling and walking) are generally not viable for Houghton Melrose and Southgate residents.

Reduced access to the CBD

- ***A significant reduction in service is proposed at peak times*** with only three buses provided for direct travel to and from the CBD (7-9am and 4-6pm). This appears inadequate given the level of demand:
 - There are currently seven Houghton Bay buses scheduled in the morning peak and six in the afternoon peak. These buses are generally full in the morning by the time they reach Constable St with people standing. It therefore appears inefficient to transfer passengers to another bus at the Newtown Hub.
 - There are currently six Southgate buses in the morning peak and five in the afternoon peak, which are reasonably full.
- The proposed peak times do not take account of school transport from the Basin Reserve around 3.30pm. For instance, we estimate that around 15 students catch the Houghton Bay bus from the Basin Reserve at 3.30pm on weekdays and most travel beyond Constable St through to Melrose / Houghton Bay. Under the new proposal they would travel two stops before changing buses in Newtown.
- The proposal does not address the need for services late evening on weekdays and weekends:
 - The last bus on weekday evenings is at 10pm from Newtown, which will severely disadvantage anyone out at night during the week going to a movie, attending a meeting or night class, and shift workers (e.g. nurses who finish their shift at 11pm). It is expensive to catch a taxi from Newtown which will considerably add to the cost of a night out and encourage people to take their cars (or 'park and ride' in Newtown, Island Bay and Kilbirnie). Currently use is made of the Houghton Bay (23) buses which also travel to Southgate in the evening.

- A late service is also required on the weekends for late night movie patrons, which include teenagers that rely on public transport.
- For security reasons it is not desirable to be changing buses in Newtown in the evenings.
- It would be beneficial for the proposal to address these issues by providing more direct services to the CBD to meet the weekday peak, school children in the afternoon and late night demand during the week and on weekends.

Transfers / extended travel times

- We are concerned about the additional time taken to travel into the CBD, where a transfer is required in Newtown. During the peak connecting buses from Island Bay and potentially Lyall Bay are likely to be reasonably full by the time they reach Newtown with the possibility that our residents will be left waiting for the next available bus with some capacity. This makes it difficult to be punctual for work, school, appointments etc.
- It is likely to be even more difficult to time the connection on the return journey. Our understanding is that the Southgate and Houghton Bay services will be linked with the Island Bay service, which will now be travelling from Johnsonville, and could frequently be delayed given the distance across the city and traffic density. If passengers miss the connection at Newtown, they are likely to have to wait 30-40 minutes or longer for the next bus. This adds considerably to what is already at least a 40 minute journey from the CBD to Houghton Valley / Southgate.

Loss of direct link through the CBD to the university

- There will no longer be a direct link from Houghton Bay or Southgate through Newtown to the University. Under the latest GRWC proposal a passenger from Houghton Bay / Southgate / Southern Newtown would need to catch three buses to get to the university during the off-peak.
- There is considerable support for continuation of the direct link to university from Houghton Bay, Melrose, Southgate and Newtown residents.
- During the peak, one transfer will be required for passengers on direct services from our area and connections will be provided from Courtenay Place and the Railway Station.
- However, during the off-peak, two connections (i.e. three buses) would be required and this would substantially add to the journey time. We therefore propose that a direct link to the university from Houghton Bay be explored during the off-peak travelling via Taranaki St and the Southern end of the Terrace to the university. The main advantages are that:
 - The service would not add to the congestion in Manners St.
 - Convenience for passengers as travel time would be greatly reduced.

- It has wide support and the link would benefit residents in Houghton Bay, Melrose, Southgate, Newtown, Mount Cook and Kelburn.

Reduced access to the Eastern Suburbs (via the Lyall Bay service)

- The frequency of the Lyall Bay service is to be reduced and in addition half of the buses will now turn left at the southern end of Onepu Rd and go to the Rongotai shopping area (and not Hungerford Rd). This will affect residents in Houghton Bay who use the service to travel to the Kilbirnie shops and the schools in the Eastern suburbs. Confirmation is also required as to whether the service will continue through to the Hungerford Rd terminus.
- The proposal would benefit from further consideration being given to links between the Southern Suburbs and the Eastern Suburbs to provide residents with access to the Kilbirnie Shops, Rongotai retail precinct, intermediate and secondary schools and sporting facilities.

Lack of infrastructure, including adequate shelter at the Newtown hub

- We have not yet seen any detailed designs or costings for the infrastructure facilities, including shelters required at major transfer points (including the Newtown hub). The adshel shelters currently outside Wellington Hospital are grossly inadequate given Wellington weather conditions and the length of time people are likely to be waiting for transfers. Weather proof shelters, adequate seating and other infrastructure (i.e. toilets) would be necessary.
- We have some significant concerns about the lack of security in the evenings at the Newtown hub given the lack of “live” shop frontages on both sides of the road near the hospital.

Cost of bus fares

- We are concerned about the cost of bus fares, especially since three bus journeys would be required to travel from Houghton Bay / Southgate to the university during the off-peak.
- 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 / Southgate area is being reduced at peak times which may tilt the balance more towards private transport and increased use of cars.
- We want to maintain a good public transport system for environmental reasons. There is a high risk that if peak services are reduced many people will take cars or taxis either directly into town or “park and ride” from Island Bay, Newtown or Kilbirnie, where there is already very little parking.

- When transfers are made, the GWRC has indicated that the fare would remain the same if the change is made 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.

5.0 Areas requiring further consultation / investigation

We appreciate that there has been an increase in off-peak services, however we remain concerned about latest proposals and the impact they will have on our community. We would therefore appreciate the opportunity to discuss and investigate the following issues in more depth with the GWRC:

- We need more than 3 direct services to the CBD to meet the weekday peak and want to discuss frequency and timing. The route via Courtenay Place to and from the Railway Station needs to be confirmed.
- We also require transport for school children (i.e. from the Basin Reserve in the afternoons).
- We would like to explore the possibility of a late night service on weekdays evenings and weekends to address the needs of shift workers and people attending the movies, meetings and evening classes.
- The continuation of the Lyall Bay service to the terminus at Hungerford Rd needs to be confirmed. Further consideration should be given to links between the Southern Suburbs and the Eastern Suburbs to provide residents with access to the Kilbrinie Shops, Rongotai retail precinct, intermediate and secondary schools and sporting facilities.
- A direct link to the university from Houghton Bay should be investigated during the off-peak travelling via Taranaki St and the Southern end of the Terrace to the university. (There is wide support for this proposal from Houghton Bay, Melrose, Southgate, Newtown and Mount Cook residents).
- Where transfers are required, connections need to be timely and consistent with sufficient capacity in connecting buses for transferring passengers.
- At the Newtown hub (outside the hospital) it would be essential to have shelters of sufficient quality to meet Wellington weather conditions, adequate seating and infrastructure (including toilet facilities).
- We have some significant concerns about the lack of security in the evenings at the Newtown hub given the lack of “live” shop frontages in the area.
- When transfers are made, the GWRC has indicated that the fare would remain the same if the change is made within 30 minutes. We propose that a changeover period

of two hours would be more realistic to cover missed buses, dense traffic and other delays.

6.0 Conclusion

The proposed reduction in peak bus services for the Houghton Valley, Melrose and Southgate suburbs would have a strongly negative impact on the well-being of our community and it would also impact on Newtown and Berhampore residents who depend on those services.

These proposals could decrease bus patronage at peak times leading to an increase in the number of cars being driven to neighbouring suburbs where bus hubs are located and into the CBD.

Our preferred option is to meet with Council Officers to work through the issues we have raised in this submission and to explore ways to make the bus system more efficient and effective for 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. We also support the use of smaller buses, during the off-peak. However, in our view more work is required 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 given to our concerns about the proposed new bus system and we would welcome the opportunity to continue to work with the Council on a revised service that meets the needs of the Houghton Valley / Melrose / Southgate community and the needs of residents in Berhampore and Newtown.

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