



**Submission to
Greater Wellington Regional Council
Proposed Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan
Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce
July 2011**

Introduction

The Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce advocates policies that reflect the interests of Wellington's business community and the development of the regional economy as a whole. It works closely with other chambers in the region and is part of the Employers' Chamber of Commerce (Central)¹.

Thank you for this opportunity to make this brief submission on the Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan.

Submission

The Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce (WECC) believes a well-developed public transport system is vital for the Wellington region.

Businesses obviously have a direct interest in a sound, reliable public transport system in that their customers, employees, suppliers and business owners themselves use it daily to commute and access the business. Public transport also provides wider economic benefits flowing from the reduction in congestion and the contribution to an efficient transport system generally.

The more people opt to use public transport, the more road space is freed up for people who have more need to use motor vehicles. Increased availability of public transport options provides an alternative to private cars. A reduction in per capita car use due to people voluntarily choosing public transport is desirable.

The Chamber is on record as being a strong advocate for the government's increased roading investment. It is important to note that this does not mean we are not also strong advocates for public transport. We support a balanced approach. Roding investment can go hand in hand with improved passenger

¹ The Employers' Chamber of Commerce Central was created out of the merger between the Wellington Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Employers and Manufacturers Association (Central) in 2010. It is part of both the New Zealand Chambers of Commerce and Business New Zealand families.

transport and other transport modes. Buses also travel on roads and even if fossil fuels do become prohibitively expensive, vehicles of the future (running on alternative fuels) will still need roads.

We support Greater Wellington's vision for public transport as set out in the Regional Land Transport Strategy. Notwithstanding this, we have concerns about the growing costs of the provision of passenger transport. We are also unconvinced that the current model is optimal. We don't have any firm policy on this at this point but we think the council and other stake holders should be open to review.

We acknowledge that some form of public involvement is necessary for public transport but rather than such a large ratepayer and tax-payer subsidy component, we think GW and the government should look at road pricing options. Charging vehicles according to use of roads and time of day would make passenger transport more economic relative to car travel. This would make the transport system operate more efficiently and be a fairer approach. We think the regional council should be lobbying the government to introduce legislation to enable road pricing and congestion charging in Wellington.

Increasing Patronage

Achieving increased passenger transport patronage is the key to improving its economic viability as well as reducing congestion and providing other public benefits.

Increased frequency (particularly at peak hours) and improved reliability (i.e. adherence to timetables) will be major factors in increasing people's propensity to switch from cars to passenger transport. It is therefore important to get the right balance between maximising patronage and revenue when fares are set. The level of subsidy is important here. We note that Wellington buses have higher farebox recovery rates (i.e. less subsidised) than in other countries.

While we support initiatives that encourage people to use passenger transport, we are totally opposed to negative measures which penalise car users such as banning vehicles from the CBD and prohibitive car parking charges. In this regard, bus lanes should be introduced as demand for bus travel rises not as a tool to force people on to buses.

Passenger transport patronage in Wellington increases quite significantly when fuel prices increase. It could be that higher future prices will encourage modal shift and without increased intervention. We would not support new taxes on vehicle usage to change motorist/commuter behaviour.

Increased Efficiency

Significant improvements to passenger transport operations will be needed to attract more people. We are pleased with the many improvements being

made by private sector operators particularly in the bus sector - Snapper electronic ticketing being a good example.

We support many of the measures under way or proposed to improve the passenger transport experience. Real time information (arrival and departure) will alleviate passenger frustration at bus stops (although adherence to timetable is more important to most passengers than knowing how late the buses will be). Signal pre-emption, more efficient use of pedestrian crossings, GPS tracking and rear door boarding will all enable a faster trip.

Public Transport Priority Measures

Public transport priority measures are effective in making public transport movement faster (and more reliable). We support the principle of giving buses priority over general traffic as a means of alleviating congestion at least at certain times of day and on certain routes.

We support the prudent use of bus lanes but believe there also needs to be sufficient flexibility for non-bus traffic to use the lanes when they are not being fully utilised by buses. For example, taxis, service vehicles and even private vehicles should be given access to some (existing and new) bus lanes at certain times of day as long as they don't stop, and as long as priority is given to buses. Transit lanes where cars carrying passengers are allowed on bus lanes are sensible. Cyclists should continue to have access to bus lanes but buses should have priority over them.

Bus lanes are preferable to segregated bus ways because of the flexibility they provide. As with light rail, segregated bus ways would close off the option of allowing other vehicles to use that space when not used by buses.

Before road space is converted to bus lanes, evidence that buses will move more people in that lane than carried in private cars should be provided.

We are supportive of other non-bus-lane priority measures including, bus advance signals, signal pre-emption - where buses are detected intelligently and given a favourable signal, and tidal lane application. We encourage more research into these mechanisms to achieve a more efficient traffic flow.

Passenger Rail

The chamber fully supports the provision of passenger rail but we have increasing concerns about the ongoing cost and whether rate-payers should be contributing as much as they are.

The region publicly funding passenger rail to the extent it is, is increasingly open to question. There is no indication that the escalating cost of restoring passenger rail is set to subside and it may be that other public transport options are more economic.

We are not convinced of the merits of the recent transfer of ownership from the Crown to Greater Wellington Regional Council given the liabilities and risks that are associated with that ownership - now borne by rate-payers. Council ownership provides no greater protection against potential run-down of the assets than existed under central government ownership.

There are also questions about GW's perceived neutrality when it is the funder of regional passenger transport yet an owner of rail operations. Rail ownership will exacerbate criticisms that already exist that buses and trains are on an uneven playing field in Wellington due to the cross-subsidisation of rail fares by bus users. We would like to see more transparency in the transport rates.

Public Transport Spine Study

We look forward to working with the council on the public transport spine study.

We have an open mind on light rail but at this stage suspect that because of the relative expense and inflexibility of track installation, modern, efficient and environmentally friendly buses are a better alternative.