

GWRC Sustainable Transport Committee meeting 20 February 2019

Commentary on agenda papers from Mike Mellor

1. Missing information—before I comment on the content of the agenda, it is important to note that there are relevant items that are not mentioned.

1.1 The Wellington City and Hutt Valley Bus Network Implementation Review – what has happened with this report? What lessons are being learned? What remedial action is being taken?

1.2 Golden Mile bus congestion – reducing bus numbers on the Golden Mile was said to be a key driver behind the introduction of the new network. Bus numbers have been reduced, but anecdotally double deckers have longer dwell time, so congestion may not have reduced as predicted. It is astonishing that seven months after implementation that not merely is there no relevant information but the whole topic itself has disappeared. Is the new network giving anticipated benefits in this respect or not? We appear to have no idea.

1.3 Train reliability and punctuality – there is a lot of discussion about these issues with respect to buses, but very little with respect to trains, and minimal data. This needs to be addressed, particularly when trains are being cancelled not only for staffing reasons but also because of planning issues and scheduled maintenance, both within the operator's control; and train punctuality has yet to reach target levels this financial year (see the graph in my Metlink Performance Report to 10 February 2019).

1.4 Performance criteria – while there are many references to performance, there are very few comparing that performance with performance criteria. This is a significant omission (the graphs in my performance report show target levels where they are in the public domain)

2. The agenda

2.1. Presentation from Transdev

Improving train-replacement bus services is very welcome, but “*No communications are necessary*” (para 3, p13)? A current significant issue is communication, with it being unclear when or where replacement buses go, running to unachievable timetables and displaying unexplained destinations like “Wellington Loop”. Whatever welcome improvements are made, communication is an essential part.

2.2. Presentation from NZ Bus

Again, “*No communications are necessary*” (3, p15)? Really???

Given the recent well-publicised train staffing issues, Transdev's perspective would be very helpful too.

2.3. Implementation of new Wellington bus network

“*Overall network performance continues to improve*” (3.1, p16) – unfortunately, that is not what published data shows, neither absolutely nor with respect to performance criteria.

“Tranzurban routes in Wellington City have lifted to an average 94% on-time performance” (3.1, p17) – since mid January the punctuality of Tranzurban’s top-five routes has dropped to 89%, below both the 90% target and November/December’s 92%.

“Since November 2018, cancellations have been less than 1%” (3.1, p18) – which is worse than the 99.5% target, achieved in just two weeks since last November.

“Hubs at...Kilbirnie...have been completed” (3.1, p18) – Kilbirnie is not complete (the covered walkway and the fence are yet to happen – see 8.1.1, p40), and Karori Tunnel and Johnsonville are still some way off (work on the main inbound stop at the latter has only just started).

“Figure 1 shows daily bus patronage” (3.2, p18) – it would be very helpful if these figures were published, and graphed in a way that made trends clear.

“Figure 2 below shows on-time performance” (3.3, p20) – the same comment applies. There appears to be worsening performance since January, confirmed by the figures for the top 10 routes.

“for the period 11 November 2018 to 10 February 2019, Tranzurban routes in Wellington City have lifted to an average of 94% on-time performance” (3.3.1, p20) – see comment re 3.1, p17 above.

“Figure 3 below shows the percentage of scheduled bus services delivered” (3.4, p21) – same comment as for Figures 1 and 2 (pp18, 20) above.

“Overall the delivery of services remains strong” (3.4, p20) – reliability for both main operators is declining, and below target.

“Cancellation rates by unit and operator” (3.4.1, p22) – this table shows that all units¹ in Wellington city (both main operators) are performing worse than the target 0.5%.

“Most customers are continuing to experience improvements” (3.6.1, p23) – the 347 positive responses represent just over a third of the 914 respondents, not “most” (and just outnumbered by the 355 who say things are worse).

“5.1.3 3 February adjustments” (p24) – this is very useful information.

“In Porirua...the transfer times will increase by up to 12 minutes” (5.1.5(a), p28) – it’s very good to see that increased transfer times are recognised here as an issue (something notably absent from information about bus timetable changes), but an increase of 12 minutes is a very big deal.²

“early arriving buses no longer need to...wait...until their scheduled departure” (5.1.5(b), p29) – I hope published information, both hard copy and online, will show the new, earlier departure times.

“Airport Flyer will be removed from Real Time Information” (5.1.5(c), p29) – this is a real failure for public transport. The separate Skybus operation in Auckland remains within the AT “family”, to everyone’s benefit, so why has that not been achieved in Wellington?

“5.1.6 3 March 2019 changes” (p29) – again, useful information.

1 Excluding the one operated by Mana/Newlands

2 I have since been told that 12 minutes was a typo.

“route 18...reduced off-peak frequency from every 10 minutes to every 15 minutes” (5.1.9, p31) – this is a bonkers proposal, failing to understand a key principle of operating an integrated network. Where routes are designed to feed into each other, their respective headways must be multiples or factors of each other, so connections with a 10-minute service (as here, at both Miramar and Kilbirnie) need to run at 10-minute (as now), 20-minute, 30-minute etc. Headways: a 15-minute headway would guarantee poor and unpredictable connections. And if just some route 2 buses make a connection, it is essential that the public is made aware of which ones do and which ones don't, but at-stop and on-bus (both external and internal) information. The absence of such information is a significant (and, sadly, unacknowledged) significant failing in the current network.

“the tracking of buses has settled round the mid-90% mark” (6.1, p38) – what is the target performance? For the last few weeks it has been dropping steadily, and there are still ghost buses on the network and buses leaving stops while the display says that they are minutes away.

“6.3.2 On-bus Driver Display update” (p39) – do drivers actually use this information? Passengers would certainly find it helpful, so why not display it to them, too?

“A report on options for hub developments at Courtenay Place and the Wellington Bus Interchange” (8.1.3, p41) – could you make this report public, please?

“Officers from WCC and GWRC have agreed to set up a joint management working group for overlapping transport issues” (9, p41) – an excellent and long-overdue initiative, and I would ask that its reports are made public. Longer term, I suggest that in the next triennium that the Wellington region takes a leaf out of Waikato's book and sets up a formal joint public transport committee, including GWRC and all territorial authorities, to oversee the region's public transport. Such an approach would avoid the inter-agency pitfalls that have become all too obvious.

“There was concern that the punctuality target is not ambitious enough” (13, p43) – a major concern here is that the target is focussed on the operator, not the passenger: there is no monitoring of arrival times en route, a vitally important part of the passenger experience (particularly with connections to be made). A passenger-focussed measure like Excess Waiting Time (how much longer a passenger has to wait than as scheduled, an industry standard measure) would enable GWRC and operators to see what passengers are actually experiencing, picking up things like the still-too-prevalent bus bunching (especially on the 2 and 3).

2.4. General Managers' report

“The pre-consultation process on the PT Plan review has been initiated with...statutory stakeholders” (3.2, p46) – could passengers please be involved with this? (The LTMA does not preclude this.)

“We have not received any negative feedback from customers about bus advertising on the rear...of buses” (4.3, p46) – the Pulse wrapping covers the rear route number display, which is bizarre, considering the work that went into getting the rear displays on these double deckers on route 1 to include destination information.

As an aside, when is similar going to happen with other routes that split, like the 3 (3L and 3R?) and the 30x (30xS and 30xM)?