

Proposal for the Extension of the Tram Route

Submission from:
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Environment Canterbury appreciates the opportunity to submit further feedback on the proposed extension of the tram route. From a passenger transport perspective, Environment Canterbury has three main issues to raise regarding the traffic implications of the proposed tram route on central city traffic flows and bus movements:

1. Extension of the Tram Route along Cashel Street:

In principle, we support the extension of the tram along Cashel Street as it could bring more tourists into this central shopping area and potentially help revitalize the area with increased activity. At present, most tourists appear to shop north of the square near the information centre, Cathedral Square and duty-free stores and may be unaware of what is offered in Cashel Mall. However, it is very unlikely that the tram will provide transport for local shoppers and commuters as it is slower, less frequent and not cost efficient for short daily trips. If it became too frequent, it could also cause greater delays to traffic on Colombo Street which would have a negative impact on bus services.

However, the prospect of opening up Cashel Street/City Mall to any type of traffic, including the tram, could have serious impacts on the traffic flow along Colombo Street. This is a key route for all north/south bus routes in Christchurch and is also used by several east/west routes to access the Bus Exchange. There is currently an average of one bus a minute travelling up or down Colombo Street each weekday, with even greater numbers during the peaks. Any changes which would create greater delays for Colombo Street traffic would therefore be detrimental to the Metro network. This would be counterproductive to the extensive bus priority work that the City Council and Environment Canterbury are currently working on to try to reduce bus travel times and increase system reliability.

2. Extension of the Tram Route to Manchester Street:

Environment Canterbury is concerned that the proposed extension of the tram route along Manchester Street could cause serious traffic delays on what is already a very congested road. This seems very likely to occur given that the proposed route has the tram crossing the northbound traffic lane on Manchester Street twice within a single block. Although no bus services currently travel along Manchester Street, there are concerns that further congestion on Manchester Street could deter drivers from using this route and cause more traffic to use Colombo Street. This would create more congestion on Colombo Street and further delay all of the Metro bus services. As stated above, this would be counterproductive to the bus priority work aimed at improving bus travel speeds and reliability.

3. Public Transport Priorities:

Environment Canterbury are concerned that the extension of the tram route may not be the best use of available resources as there are currently more pressing issues facing public transport in Christchurch. Projects such as bus priority and a new bus exchange facility are extremely high priorities for the city at present as both will be crucial factors in supporting the growth of the Metro network in the future. As fuel prices continue to increase and government initiatives promote more sustainable travel patterns, public transport has a vital role to play in the future development of Christchurch so priority should be given to any work that will enhance the Metro network.