

2. MOBILE LIBRARY REVIEW: EVALUATION OF TRIAL PERIOD

Officer responsible
Libraries Manager

Author
Erina Parks, Outreach and Special Needs, DDI 941-6645

The purpose of this report is to outline the results of the trial period of the revised mobile library service, implemented in August 2001 as a one-vehicle service, and to recommend that mobile services continue to be provided from one bus. The review originated as one of the Outputs and Standards Projects.

CONTEXT

The purpose of the Mobile Library Review was to:

- Clarify the role of the Mobiles in the Library's business,
- Improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of the service.

The review was conducted in two stages. Stage one defined the role of the mobile library service as part of the library's business, established criteria for providing the service, and identified benchmarks for evaluating the use. The Output and Standards Committee adopted this report on 6 September 2000.

Stage Two determined where and how mobile library services would be delivered across Christchurch City. A schedule of stops was developed and five stops were recommended for disestablishment. The Community Services Committee adopted those recommendations in May 2001, as a trial for a period of up to one year. The new schedule took effect from 30 July 2001.

This final stage of the Mobile Library Review has evaluated the trial period August 2001 to March 2002, measured the statistics from that period against the adopted benchmarks for customers and issues, and noted any customer feedback resulting from the changes made.

ANALYSIS OF THE TRIAL PERIOD

Customer feedback on the changes was generally low key, and a mixture of concern and satisfaction. Inevitably, some customers were inconvenienced by the change of day or time, and a few elected to use alternate services at a fixed-point library. Others were delighted by the more convenient time for the visit to their locality.

At the time of the initial review, customers at the five stops that were recommended for disestablishment were surveyed, a large number already used existing static library services in conjunction with their use of the mobile libraries. Most customers had access to alternative services and information on options, such as housebound delivery for the frail elderly, was made available.

There has been no feedback to date from any customers about not being able to access library services owing to cuts or changes made to the service.

The least satisfactory changes in timetable were at Middleton Road, Upper Riccarton, where the time changed from that which school children could use, to an early morning slot. However there are good numbers of children using the library bus during school holidays. The other less satisfactory change was at Avondale's Breezes Road/Chisnallwood stop, where once again school children missed out on the opportunity to use the bus because of the earlier stopping time. Unfortunately with combining the service from two vehicles into one it was not possible to accommodate all the stops near schools into the available after-3pm time slots.

Following the collation and measurement of available statistics from the August 2001-March 2002 period against the benchmarks, some under-performing stops have been identified. These stops were also evaluated for other extenuating circumstances such as distance from an alternative service, or socio-economic reasons for maintaining the service. Other factors taken into account have been the need for some minor adjustments to the timetable to accommodate changes in network operational procedures, and safer driving times between stops.

RESULTS OF CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY BOARD CONSULTATION

When all benchmark measures and social and other factors were included in the evaluation, two additional stops were identified as being clearly unviable and are being recommended for disestablishment:

- Hillmorton, corner Hoon Hay and Halswell Roads,
- Brooklands stop at Styx Boating Reserve, Heyders Road.

Viability of a third stop at Kainga was also in doubt, but socio-economic factors and distance from an alternative service were considered. Some time saving on Saturday has provided the opportunity to trial a weekly Saturday service instead of the current fortnightly Friday visit.

Customers at Hoon Hay/Halswell Rd, Styx Boating Reserve, and Kainga were consulted via a short written questionnaire asking:

- Use of other library service points,
- Means of transport to the mobile stop,
- Ability to access alternative library services.

The findings indicate that all customers are able to easily access alternative services at adjacent mobile library stops, or in the case of Kainga, would support a change of day for the visit.

Reports to the June meetings of Spreydon-Heathcote and Shirley-Papanui Community Boards recommending the closure of stops at Hillmorton and Styx Boating Reserve were approved by the respective Boards, along with the change of day for the visit to Kainga. The Shirley-Papanui Community Board added the recommendation that the Libraries Unit consider building a library in Belfast in the future to service rural communities.

In addition to the two stops cut from service, some other stops have had their times increased. A copy of the revised timetable is attached as Appendix 1.

CONCLUSIONS

There appear to be no adverse impacts on customers from the reduction of service from two buses to one. The single bus is working more productively with its hours of operation having been increased by greater than 50%. Cost savings of approximately \$76,000 were identified as being achievable mainly through vehicle and staff savings. These savings have been realised and used to offset cost increases in other areas of operation so that budget increases have been held to under inflation.

Issue figures from the mobile libraries had been dropping dramatically before the change to one bus. Issues since the changes have held constant and, although the final end of year figures are not yet available, it seems likely that the issue per hour of service will increase significantly, and the cost per issue decrease in like measure. These figures will be reported in the Library's annual plan report.

NATURAL + PEOPLE + ECONOMIC STEP ASSESSMENT

#	CONDITION:	Meets condition ✓✓0*	HOW IT HELPS MEET CONDITION:
The Natural Step			
N1	Reduce non-renewable resource use	✓✓0*	
N2	Eliminate emission of harmful substances	✓✓0*	One bus's emissions only into the atmosphere
N3	Protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystems	✓✓0*	
N4	People needs met fairly and efficiently	NA	NA - See People Step + Economic Step
The People Step			
P1	Basic needs met	✓✓0*	Those who need mobile service are still able to access it
P2	Full potential developed	✓✓0*	
P3	Social capital enhanced	✓✓0*	
P4	Culture and identity protected	✓✓0*	
P5	Governance and participatory democracy strengthened	✓✓0*	
The Economic Step			
E1	Effective and efficient use of all resources	✓✓0*	Savings of \$76,000 realised and used to offset other costs. Cost per transaction and issues per hour of service improved.
E2	Job rich local economy	✓✓0*	
E3	Financial sustainability	✓✓0*	

Recommendation:

1. That the Council confirm mobile services being provided using one vehicle.
2. That a subsequent report be brought forward in due course providing an overview of library facilities.
3. That a report be provided on the possible provision of an electric mobile service vehicle to coincide with the replacement period for the existing mobile library vehicle.