

10. CENTRAL CITY SHUTTLE REVIEW

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of progress on the review of the central city shuttle service.

INTRODUCTION

The structure of the shuttle review was approved by the Council at its April 2004 meeting. This review is a four stage process comprising:

1. Base data gathering.
2. Review data, report findings, make recommendations.
3. Option testing in the community and with stakeholders.
4. Adoption.

This report provides findings and makes recommendations for stages one and two. The following sections outline the results of investigations made since April 2004.

BOARDING AND ALIGHTING COUNTS

Passenger counters were placed on shuttles on a Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday in order to reflect normal weekday and weekend boarding patterns. They were on each of the shuttles from 8am to 10pm Thursday, Friday 8am to 11pm, Saturday 9am to 11pm and Sunday 10am to 8pm, which is close to the normal operating hours of the Shuttle on those days.

The detailed analysis of these results is still in progress and will be presented at the meeting. In summary they show the highest boarding figures are around the Square (in both directions), with significant numbers also boarding at Smiths City, along Moorhouse Avenue (primarily from Pak'n Save) and at the Town Hall and Court House.

Low boarding numbers were observed at the Polytechnic and along St Asaph Street, however, the former can be attributed to the fact that due to the timing of the review, the Polytechnic was out of term. Covering counts are currently underway to establish the level of use of this stop.

Whilst there are shuttle stops with boardings much higher than other stops along the route, the stops experience patronage levels sufficient not to warrant consideration of a route change to the existing service.

There is one stop that experiences very little use and this is located along St Asaph Street, just west of Manchester Street. It is not recommended to change the route in this area, however, as St Asaph Street is the only means to access Colombo Street close to the South City Mall on its northbound trip and the quite popular stop going northbound between St Asaph Street and Tuam Street.

SHUTTLE STOP INFRASTRUCTURE ASSESSMENT

In general the level and standard of shuttle stop infrastructure is to a good standard and this is due to monthly inspections and cleaning operations that ensure standards of cleanliness are maintained.

It has been noted, however, that over half of the stops have no timetable or route information. This is to be rectified as soon as possible.

It is also noted that a number of requests have been received through the consultation process for the provision of a shelter at the Pak'n Save shuttle stop on the corner of Colombo Street and Moorhouse Avenue. It is recommended that this location be added to the list of shelter installations to be actioned through the Public Transport Strategy target of 500 shelters. The provision of this shelter is warranted given the number of boarding passengers (mostly with bags of shopping), the good available space and the orientation of the stop which is subject to head on southerly winds.

This stop also needs to have its stopping area modified in conjunction with completion of the Smiths City site redevelopment fronting onto Moorhouse Avenue. This was requested by the operator following concerns over the close proximity of this site to the intersection and anecdotal evidence that cars follow too close to shuttles as they make the left turn from Colombo Street.

VEHICLE PERFORMANCE AND RELIABILITY

The current vehicle reliability is not consistent with the expected reliability advised by the vehicle manufacturers. This has resulted in a consistent absence of up to two yellow shuttle buses at any given time over the last 18 months at least.

Advice that has been received from the operator suggests this problem has now been identified as a design fault by the manufacturer and is in the process of being redesigned and retrofitted to extend the service life of the particular part which has been failing. This should ensure that the full complement of yellow shuttle buses will be on the road more often in the coming months.

ROUTE PERFORMANCE

With four shuttles in operation the circuit should take 40 minutes to maintain the 10 minute day route frequency. Typically two shuttles are in operation to maintain the required frequencies after 6pm as traffic volumes reduce. It is apparent from the boarding counts (which included boarding times at each stop) that the reliability of the shuttle service is acceptable and this is borne out in the consultation report in attachment 1 which indicated 74% of users are happy with the frequency. There were no comments made in this regard from non-users.

A point that did come out of the consultation were comments regarding overloading at peak times and particularly in the evening peak and at weekends. This was confirmed by the operator in their feedback. It is recommended that this be investigated further.

USER AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

A number of user and stakeholder meetings have been conducted, including on-board user interviews, operator/staff meetings, presentations and discussions with key interest groups (such as the Central City Mayoral Forum and the Passenger Transport Advisory Group), to gather views from a broad range of central city interests and the wider community.

The results of a consultation exercise undertaken as part of the review are included in attachment 1.

Overall the level of satisfaction with the service was very high, with only some indication that the level of shuttle stop infrastructure could be improved. The only consistent theme in this regard was the request for a shelter at the Pak'n Save stop on the corner of Colombo Street and Moorhouse Avenue (as discussed above).

It has also been highlighted above about the absence of timetable and route information at over half the stops and that this should be resolved as soon as possible.

A consistent response during the user interviews and in the leaflets returned by post was the request for more capacity at peak times. This is confirmed by the operator and in the passenger counting figures.

There was a strong theme running through the responses of many people questioned about the shuttle that there is a strong preference for a service serving the cultural precinct. There were also consistent requests for a service to the east of the central city and to Bealey Avenue and Sydenham. It is recommended that investigations are made into this and that the Committee advises of its willingness to proceed with these investigations. It is understood that an investigation into serving these areas would meet with support from the Central City Mayoral Forum.

The operator has made some comments on the current service and these are included in attachment 1. In particular they comment on the success of the current service but highlight capacity issues at peak times and options available to improve the service involving changes to operational hours and higher frequencies at certain times. This is discussed later in the report.

The operator has expressed the view some potential exists in running the current night route throughout the day (ie not serving the Town Hall and Convention Centre), however, this has not been reflected in the consultation of users. There is some merit in this proposal in that it would serve the lower portion of Victoria Street shops, however, on balance it is felt that the weight of this argument does not outweigh the merits of serving Kilmore Street during the day.

The operator has also suggested some operational hours changes that would result in the shuttle starting half an hour earlier in the mornings to serve commuters, but also finishing earlier at night when there is a marked decline in passenger numbers. The operator has also suggested an increase in frequency on Friday and Saturday evenings and at peak times when the existing passenger carrying capacity is most challenged. These suggestions are consistent with review findings to date on passenger loadings.

The off-street parking team has also raised the potential to service parking buildings, as they also did during the development stages of the current service. Due to the success and popularity of the existing route, it is not thought appropriate to consider a change at this time but rather include their proposal as part of the brief for a new route concept discussed later in this report. It should be noted, however, that the existing route runs less than one block or closer to all central city Council car park buildings, except the Art Gallery and Manchester Street buildings.

CONCLUSION

This report summarises the work completed to date on the review of the central city shuttle. This work has comprised passenger counting, user interviews, operator feedback, a shuttle stop infrastructure assessment and consultation with other central city organisations and representative groups.

The stops are well used around the current shuttle route, indicating that there are no areas that warrant removal from or a change to the existing route. It is also clear from the user consultation that there is a high level of satisfaction with the current service, which in particular is used to shop and access leisure and recreation activities in the city, which was the primary objective of the service at its inception in 1998.

It is recommended that staff investigate options to meet peak period capacity demands on the existing route together with improving the operational hours and Friday and Saturday evening frequency proposals received from the operator. Findings from these investigations can be reported back to the Committee at its August 2004 meeting. It is feasible that a close to cost neutral arrangement could be agreed with the operator (a balance of less operational hours with increased frequency at certain times) to make these improvements at close to the existing contract price.

There was a strong desire to see a service to the cultural precinct and a number of requests for a service that includes places like Bealey Avenue, the eastern inner city and Sydenham. There is also some merit in the concept of serving parking buildings around the central city. Most if not all of these suggestions would change the nature of the service if implemented by simply adding to the existing service route and likely result in it not meeting the current objectives as well as it does now. It is recommended that the Committee approve a study into these concepts based on the presumption that this would be a separate service from the existing one, which appears to be optimal in its current form and highly popular with the community (subject to the resolution of issues raised above). A timeline showing the investigation, consultation, Council decision and tendering process should be prepared for approval that is consistent with the Council funding allocation timelines.

The recommendations to be made to the Committee's August 2004 meeting will allow stage three of the review to proceed, which tests any options approved by the Committee among stakeholders and the community. Stage four can then be completed at the Committee's September 2004 meeting when final recommendations are made and a decision made in time to complete the formalities necessary to continue the service.

Staff**Recommendation:**

1. That a passenger shelter and seat be provided at the Colombo Street/Moorhouse Avenue (Pak'n Save) shuttle stop.
2. That timetable and route information be provided and maintained at every shuttle stop.
3. That staff investigate, develop and recommend options for consultation (with financial implications) for operational hours and service frequency improvements to the existing service for consideration at the Committee's August 2004 meeting.

Chairman's**Recommendation:**

1. That the above recommendation be adopted.
2. That the feasibility, costs and ramifications (including effects on the tram) of an east-west service, including the cultural precinct, be investigated in time for the 2006/07 LTCCP, but that no investigation of extension to Bealey Avenue or Sydenham be made at this stage.
3. That the staff investigate:
 - (a) An additional vehicle for the current service.
 - (b) The night time route being adopted all day with the daytime level of service.