

9. DRAFT REGIONAL PASSENGER TRANSPORT PLAN – COUNCIL SUBMISSION

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval of issues to be included in a Council submission to Environment Canterbury on their Draft Canterbury Regional Passenger Transport Plan (RPTP).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Regional Council (ECan) is required by the Land Transport Act 1998 (as modified by the Land Transport Management Act 2003) to prepare a Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) every 3 to 10 years. An RPTP forms a part of this. The current RLTS was adopted by ECan in March 2005. The RPTP is now under review by ECan and seeks comments from all stakeholders. The draft RPTP is attached for information.
3. The RPTP vision is consistent with the RLTS vision, whilst its targets are informed by the public passenger transport strategy. The RPTP sets the objectives and policies for passenger transport to achieve the vision of the RLTS.
4. There are five policy areas containing 43 policies in the draft plan, covering:
 1. network of services
 2. service performance standards
 3. funding
 4. fares
 5. providers of services and infrastructure

Paragraphs 5 to 12 below provide information on changes proposed by ECan to the existing RPTP which it is anticipated the Council may wish to comment upon.

5. The key issue in policy area 1 (network of services) that the Council may wish to comment upon is the policy of only providing weekend and evening services according to demand. Whilst in reality it is noted that most services provide weekend and evening services, the policy allows for weekday daytime services only. This could potentially limit the travel opportunities for some people needing to travel at evenings and weekends, whilst it is also recognised that demand can grow with the introduction of a new service if promoted effectively.
6. There are a number of issues in policy area 2 (service performance standards) on which the Council may wish to comment. Firstly is the issue of capacity constraints (passenger standing). The proposed policy states that there should be no more than 25% of passengers standing in the peak. This is a good policy in principle. However, the acceptable duration for which a passenger may stand and its frequency of occurrence is not stated. It would be of greater use and easier to monitor if a more prescriptive policy was developed.
7. A further matter in this area is the policy in relation to passengers being provided alternative transport, should a trip be cancelled for any reason. It is unclear how this policy will be monitored and enforced, and also in line with recognised principles of good customer service, how the passenger will be compensated for the inconvenience caused. It is understood this is not a frequent occurrence. However, high standards of customer service must be maintained to encourage the attraction and retention of new bus users.

8. A further issue in this area is a change from the current policy in relation to vehicle speed. Currently the policy relates bus speeds to car speeds, so that express core services approach 125% of car speeds. The proposed policy seeks to decouple bus and car speeds, so that as congestion rises buses maintain an operational speed of 26 km/h in the peak periods on high demand corridors. It is understood that this is the current average speed of buses on such corridors in the peaks. It would be helpful if these "high demand corridors" could be stated by name and the start and finish point, so that monitoring and planning for traffic management improvements can take place on a sound technical footing.
9. Finally, for policy area 2, is the matter of super low floor (SLF) buses. These are buses without steps at the doors so that elderly, disabled and wheelchair users are able to board easily. The proposed policy says that all trips in the off-peak should be made with SLF buses, but that peak trips only need to be made with SLF's at the off peak frequency. This could lead to wheelchair users for example being left behind in the peak.
10. Policy area 3 (funding) seeks a change to the current cost recovery policy of 40-60% of total system costs, to a minimum of 50% of total costs. The intent of this policy is to limit the extent to which government contributions (from taxpayers) and regional rates (from ratepayers) subsidise the costs of people choosing to travel by metro. The Council may wish to suggest that ECan advocate strongly to central government for a greater contribution to public passenger transport services (to minimise fare rises and rate increases) given the additional taxes collected as a result of fuel price rises.
11. Policy area 4 (fares) seeks to remove the entitlement to discounted fares for the congenital and intellectually disabled. The Council may wish to comment on this proposal. The advantage of this is that it allows across the board lower fares to be maintained for a greater number of people.
12. Policy area 5 (providers of services and infrastructure) is of interest to the Council as we provide the infrastructure to support bus services such as bus stops, passenger shelters, roads, the bus exchange, etc. A new policy states that ECan shall work with the Council to ensure the standards of infrastructure are such to achieve the objectives of the RPTP. In reality this will have no new effect on the Council's programmes, as we already work closely with ECan on such matters and work is already underway, for example on the Council's own bus stop infrastructure standards.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

13. There are no changes proposed in the draft plan that are envisaged to require changes to the City Council's current programmes, responsibilities and commitments. The final adopted version of the Christchurch Public Passenger Transport Strategy currently under review, may however require changes in levels of service in the future, that may impact upon future funding. These may be addressed in the next LTCCP.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Council request staff to make a submission to Environment Canterbury on its Draft Canterbury Regional Passenger Transport Plan, the content of which should be as contained in paragraphs 5-12.