

4. MOBILE LIBRARIES REVIEW: STAGE TWO

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The purpose of this report is to report back to the Committee on Stage Two of the Mobile review that originated as one of the Outputs and Standards Projects. The aim of the Mobile Review was to:

- (i) Clarify the role of the Mobiles in the library's business; and
- (ii) Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

BACKGROUND

This report was researched and produced by Erina Parks (Outreach & Special Needs Librarian), Elaine Sides, Sam Gurney, and Hilary Renfree (Area Manager).

The review has been conducted in two stages. Stage One defined the role of the mobile library service and developed criteria for providing such a service (adopted by Outputs and Standards Committee, 6 Sept 2000). Stage Two now considers ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

STAGE ONE

Stage One of this review defined the role of the mobile library service as part of the library's business, established criteria for the provision of service, and identified benchmarks to evaluate the service.

The role of the Mobile Library was defined as:

The Mobile Library supports Christchurch City Libraries in providing equity of access to residents of all ages. It offers popular materials in various formats to meet recreation, information and learning needs.

The criteria established for the provision of Mobile Library Service were to:

- Operate within Christchurch City Council boundaries
- Reduce barriers to library service. Barriers can be defined as physical location, such as distance from an established library; age, such as the very young or the elderly; mobility, such as access to transport
- Be complementary to existing library service. It differs from fixed site libraries in that it is a popular materials service, providing service to those outside 1.5km distance from an existing service
- Target specific groups: elderly, school children, pre-school children

The Output and Standards Committee adopted the Stage One report on 6 September 2000.

STAGE TWO REVIEW

The objectives of Stage Two of the review are to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the Mobile Library service by:

- Using criteria and benchmarks established in Stage One to determine the viability of present stops.
- Identifying areas in Christchurch where it would be desirable to provide mobile library service, and measuring these against the established criteria.
- Determining the most efficient and effective way to deliver the service.

Over recent years there has been a gradual but accelerating decline in business on the mobiles. For example, there was a 7.3% decrease in 1997/98, 8.5% decrease in 1998/99, and 17.5% decrease in 1999/2000. This has resulted in an increase in operational costs and cost per transaction compared to other community libraries.

The decline in business has come about by a combination of factors, such as changes to existing libraries and the building of new ones (the 'wow' factor), redevelopment of large suburban malls changing people's travelling and shopping patterns, and the customer expectation of computer access at libraries.

Efficiencies and cost-effectiveness can be improved by either increasing the amount of business or by maintaining the same amount of business and reducing the costs of achieving it.

Previous efforts to increase business through advertising and letter box drops have not produced a corresponding increase in issues. As such there is a need to look at ways to make efficiency gains and reductions in the transaction costs by reducing the cost of delivering the mobile service.

VIABILITY OF PRESENT STOPS

The methodology for assessing the viability of present stops consisted of plotting existing libraries on a map, with a 1.5km catchment area around each service point. Council housing complexes were identified as these were associated with low-income residents who may have transport barriers in getting to a fixed-point library. Taking a “clean slate” approach, possible gaps in areas not covered by a fixed-point library were then identified, taking into consideration council housing, shopping malls, schools, community centres, and major arterial roads.

Residential areas were focussed on, as residents seem more likely to use a library close to their home rather than work (e.g. the Christchurch Airport area was rejected, which has a significant working population but no permanent residents).

Existing mobile library stops were then evaluated against the Stage One criteria, such as customers and issues per hour, and proximity to another library. From this, some stops have been recommended for cuts as outlined below.

The possible stops were then re-examined and compared to the remaining mobile stops to achieve a close match between possible and actual stops. Factors considered in this exercise were demographics, community focal points, and access to transport. Timetable options were then developed and basic costs estimated to determine what could be achieved by the use of either one or two vehicles.

FINDINGS

When evaluated against the Stage One criteria, six stops clearly failed to meet the criteria. Five of these have been recommended for deletion. They are:

North New Brighton - Travis Road
Bromley - Keighleys Road/School
Mairehau - Clearbrook Street
Belfast – School
Dallington - Gloucester Street

Kainga also did not meet the Stage One criteria. However, following consultation with the Shirley/Papanui Community Board, it is proposed that a service be provided to Kainga on alternate weeks with Spencerville.

The first five stops are either well inside the catchment area of a fixed-point library, or customers travel to the stop by car and use other libraries as well as the mobile (customer survey conducted during Stage One). It is therefore unlikely that customers greatly inconvenienced by a reduction in these stops.

Two Kainga customers also use other mobile stops and it is noted that Kainga residents now have four Monday to Friday return bus trips between Kainga and Northlands/Papanui Library. There are also five trips on Saturday. After the proposed trial the Kainga stop will be reassessed to see if it meets the criteria.

A number of other stops have also been reduced in time in the expectation that this will enable them to reach the benchmark standards.

COMMUNITY BOARD CONSULTATION

Information on the proposed stops was presented to the following Community Boards: Burwood/Pegasus (Travis Road), Hagley/Ferrymead (Keighleys Road, Gloucester Street), and Shirley/Papanui (Kainga, Clearbrook Street, Belfast School).

Both Burwood/Pegasus and Hagley Ferrymead Boards received the information. Shirley/Papanui Community Board had some concerns about the proposed stopping of the Kainga stop. A compromise solution involving alternating the service between Spencerville and Kainga on a fortnightly basis will be debated at their 2 May meeting. The outcome will be verbally reported to this meeting.

WAYS TO ACHIEVE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT SERVICE

In order to achieve this outcome the team identified three possible options:

1. Keep both library buses and increase the level of issues so as to reduce the overall cost per transaction and bring that cost more into line with other community libraries. This is not regarded as feasible for the reasons outlined above. The business does not appear to be there, and we have not identified sufficient new stopping places that might generate new business.

There would be no savings to Council if this option were retained.

2. Keep both library buses, with each bus providing Saturday morning service, plus one bus providing one late night. This would provide service to all the stops currently meeting or expected to meet the benchmarks for service. Four new stops could be included. This scenario would not utilise the buses fully, with up to six half days not being used to deliver mobile library services. Other library use for the free time would not be easy, with the need to have stock on board that meets the needs of the customer group being served at the time.

Savings to Council would be about \$29,500.

3. Use one bus to provide service on one late night and all day Saturday, to all the stops that currently meet or are expected (with reduced stopping time) to meet the criteria and benchmarks. No additional stops introduced.

Savings to Council would be about \$76,000.

It is apparent that to achieve any significant efficiencies and savings the service would need to be reduced to one bus. In other words, try to maintain the current level of business that the mobile service provides, but reduce the costs of doing that business by cutting operational costs, namely staffing and vehicle costs.

It is proposed that service hours will be reduced from 44 hours currently provided by the two mobile library buses, to 32 hours to be provided from one vehicle. A proposed timetable for the single bus option is attached as Appendix One.

The team briefly looked at possible options for reusing the savings, but no definitive work has been done on what would be the best option if one bus became available for other services. Possibilities range from using the other bus for other activities, eg a technology bus, to selling the second bus and using the savings to enable other services to be extended or improved. However, the team believes that it is too early to make a decision until the impacts on customers from the changes to service have been assessed.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the Mobile Library service be provided from one vehicle and that this be trialed for a period of up to one year.