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NORTHERN SUBURBS PASSENGER TRANSPORT STUDY

1. Purpose of Report

To explain the proposed Northern Suburbs Passenger Transport Study and seek Committee agreement to the Council's involvement.

2. Executive Summary

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 1. Receive the information.*
- 2. Agree to the Council's participation as co-convenor of the Study as proposed in this report.*

4. Background

In November 2004, Land Transport NZ approved \$276m of funding requested by Greater Wellington over the period to 2015 for the retention of rail services in the Wellington region. A condition of that approval was that there be a full review of the Rail Business Case within 3 years, including a review of the passenger transport services to Johnsonville and Melling.

In May this year, the Chairman of Greater Wellington wrote to Mayor Prendergast enclosing a draft Terms of Reference for the proposed review of the Johnsonville Line and seeking her comment. The original Terms of Reference envisaged a study focused on the existing Johnsonville Rail Line within a tight timeframe (completion by December 2005).

The main points in the Mayor's reply are quoted below.

"In my view, the Study is critical to the future development of the city, and we are looking forward to being involved. I do, however, have some concerns about the contents of the Terms of Reference.

The first relates to the scope of the work involved.

Development trends within the city boundaries show potential for growth along a “spine” from the Northern growth areas through the central city, along Newtown and in the Eastern suburbs. This growth is already occurring, and the challenge for us is how to manage it to achieve land use and urban form objectives for the city. We are currently developing an Urban Development Strategy to set out the management process for the next 50 years, and transport oriented development will be an essential part of this strategy.

The Johnsonville Line constitutes an important transport link in this growth spine. Unfortunately, in its current form it is a very imperfect system being inefficient, slow, of limited capacity and with a poor walking catchment. Meshblock population statistics also show it has been ineffective in achieving densification around transport nodes.

To achieve our urban development objectives, the ideal scenario is a seamless mass transport system from the Northern Growth areas through Johnsonville via the CBD to the airport. It is well understood that commuters dislike interchanges, and this currently acts as a major impediment to the use of public transport services from the Northern suburbs using the Johnsonville Line. In an ideal world, it would be possible to commute from Johnsonville to Massey University, the hospital or the airport without changing services.

The Johnsonville Line has been acknowledged as substandard for at least 30 years, and the problem is not just the standard of the rolling stock, or the speed of the trains. It is more fundamental and goes to the overall configuration of the service.

For this reason, I believe the Terms of Reference need to be broadened out to encompass all the public transport services in the Northern suburbs. We should be explicitly seeking to achieve a seamless transport service down this corridor through the CBD and need to consider all options to achieve this which could include an extension to the current rail line, light rail or busways. A 1993 report by Travers Morgan commissioned by (Greater Wellington) showed that a number of such options were feasible.

My second concern is about the tight timeframe of the study. Clearly, this relates to the scope of the work. I am advised that a comprehensive assessment of transport options for the Northern suburbs would take at least a year. While it is desirable to achieve an outcome to the Study as expeditiously as possible, this should not be done by compromising the quality or scope of the work. Moreover, there are a number of critics of the current rail line in the community, and I feel certain they would not be satisfied by a study that failed to address the more fundamental issues.”

It also became apparent in discussions with officers from Greater Wellington that, based on feedback from consultants, the original budget proposed for the Study of \$100-200,000 was too low.

As a result of this initiative, Mr Buchanan agreed to expand the draft Terms of Reference as proposed by the Mayor, and officers from WCC and Greater Wellington have worked together to produce an updated draft which broadens out the scope of the study as proposed in the Mayor’s letter (copy attached). Council officers have also

discussed the option of WCC providing a financial contribution to the Study which would put us into partnership with Greater Wellington. The current working budget estimate is \$300,000, which would be funded 50% by Land Transport NZ, and 25% each by Greater Wellington and WCC. This provides us with extremely good value for money for a minimal outlay, given the importance of the Study.

In addition, Greater Wellington has agreed to appoint Greg Campbell as co-convenor of the Study. This will help to ensure that the Council's issues and concerns are properly addressed. The deadline for completing the Study has been extended to 31 July 2006.

Greater Wellington has issued invitations to tender to four qualified transport planning consultancies, and the closing date for tenders was 22 July. The preferred tenderer has been selected and is....Greater Wellington will be taking the proposal to its Passenger Transport Committee on 11 August for final sign-off.

This report seeks formal approval for the Council's involvement in the Study as co-convenor and funder.

5. Discussion

5.1 Merits of Council Involvement

The Study is a condition of a recent LTNZ decision and Greater Wellington is committed to proceeding. The issue in this report is whether WCC should participate in the Study in partnership with Greater Wellington.

Making a financial contribution and co-convening the Study will provide the Council with an excellent opportunity to ensure our issues and concerns are fully considered. The issues in the Terms of Reference are critical to our Urban Development Strategy and the liveability of the Northern Suburbs. The provision of an updated and fully integrated public transport system for the suburbs would also provide a valuable travel demand management tool to help control road traffic on adjacent roads.

The alternative would be for WCC to participate in the Study merely as an interested party. This would substantially reduce our ability to influence its outcomes.

5.2 Consultation

The proposed consultation process for the Study is intended to comply with the provisions of the Land Transport Management Act and essentially involves a three stage consultation process, similar to that used in the Western Corridor Transport Study. In addition, it is intended to establish a reference group for the study.

The reference group will be made up of two community representatives, a user representative, two Greater Wellington Councillors, a WCC Councillor and a staff member from each of the Greater Wellington and Wellington City councils. The final makeup of the group has yet to be decided, but it is intended that the Mayor, as Transport Portfolio Spokesperson, would be included.

In addition, WCC officers intend to augment the consultation plan to include consultation with Councillors from affected wards, residents associations and relevant MPs.

6. Conclusion

Participation in the Northern Suburbs Passenger Transport Study provides a window of opportunity to directly influence investment decisions that will affect our residents for decades to come.

Contact Officer: *Greg Campbell, Senior Strategic Advisor*

Supporting Information

1) Strategic Fit / Strategic Outcome

The proposals in this report are consistent with the vision in the current Transport Strategy (approved May 2004), specifically:

Integrated – the different types of transport – car, bus, train, cable car, ferries, walking, cycling - must complement each other and produce a total transport system that maximises the benefits of each.

Accessible – transport options should enable people and organisations to move around and reach their destinations easily.

Efficient – the transport system should contribute to the economic viability of the city by facilitating movement of people and goods.

Creative – willing to explore and adopt innovative and creative solutions to transport issues.

Sustainable – the transport system should be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, thereby ensuring the wise allocation and use of resources, including non-renewable energy sources, and should cater for the long-term needs of the community as a whole.

2) LTCCP/Annual Plan reference and long term financial impact

The financial impact will be a one-off contribution to the Study funding, to be funded from the general consulting budget.

3) Treaty of Waitangi considerations

Not applicable.

4) Decision-Making

This is a significant decision of relevance to the City's future transport infrastructure and urban form.

5) Consultation

a) General Consultation

A detailed consultation programme is being developed as part of the Study

b) Consultation with Maori

Iwi will be included, as required, during the consultation phase

6) Legal Implications

Not applicable.

7) Consistency with existing policy

Consistent with current Transport Strategy