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Report to the Passenger Transport Committee
By Anthony Cross, Manager, Public Transport

Public Transport Update: November 2000

1. Purpose

To update the Committee on recent developments and work in progress in the Public Transport Department.

2. Rail Timetables

We have received from Tranz Rail draft timetables which incorporate significant improvements in a number of respects, particularly for the Paraparaumu line. We will be investigating them in detail prior to them being costed for introduction under Transfund's new funding policy early in the New Year.

3. Churton Park, Grenada Village, Newlands

Work has started on typesetting the new timetables for these services. We are working towards an early December introduction, although this may yet be further delayed because, disappointingly, the Wellington City Council had at the time of writing received objections in relation to 11 of the 84 new bus stops required.

4. Kapiti After Midnight Service

This service began on the weekend of 7 and 8 October. We have yet to see patronage figures, but early indications are that early usage has been entirely satisfactory.

5. Surveys

... **Attached** are copies of recent surveys distributed to residents of Titahi Bay and to workers in the Seaview Gracefield area. The latter survey will also be carried out in Upper Hutt in the near future. A Wellington CBD cordon survey was also carried out this month, although the data has yet to be entered and analysed.

6. **International Public Transport Association (UITP) 2nd Asia-Pacific Congress, Melbourne, 9-13 October 2000**

I attended the UITP's Congress in Melbourne recently. The UITP was established in 1885 and has its headquarters in Belgium. It established its Asia-Pacific Division in 1993.

6.1 **Adelaide**

During my time in Australia I also travelled privately to Adelaide to see something of that city's public transport system. Quite fortuitously, I was able to attend and contribute to a forum organised by the local lobby group People for Public Transport.

It was well supported by politicians (being attended by the State Minister for Transport and Urban Planning as well as by her Opposition counterpart), managers of operating companies and Passenger Transport Board officials, as well as by a cross-section of users.

Of particular interest to me was the keynote speaker, Dr Paul Mees of Melbourne University, who is the author of the highly readable and thought-provoking book "A Very Public Solution - Transport in the Dispersed City", which compares the public transport policies of Melbourne and Toronto, and challenges the traditional view that European-style public transport is not feasible in lower density New World cities. We have a copy of the book in the Council's library, and I would certainly recommend it.

Adelaide combines the population of Auckland with the geography and atmosphere of Christchurch. In common with both those cities, it has lower levels of public transport usage than Wellington or any of the other mainland state capitals. While the State Government is attempting to address the level of car dependency in the city, the rail system, which carries the same number of passengers per year as Wellington's, is yet again under threat from those who would have it replaced by more guided busways of the sort which has served the city's outer north-eastern suburbs since the early 1980s. Overall public transport service levels, particularly in the evenings and on Saturdays and Sundays, are generally less than those in Wellington, and the city is clearly not as dependent on its public transport system, but nonetheless many of the issues being faced are similar.

The South Australian Government is not afraid to experiment with new transport ideas – the O-Bahn busway is still contentious after nearly twenty years, and currently there is a debate about the extension of the one-way arterial expressway through the outer south-western suburbs, the first stage of which opened earlier this year. Traffic flows towards the CBD between 2am and 2pm, and away from the CBD between 2pm and 2am on weekdays. The opposite directions apply on weekends and public holidays, when the dominant flow is to and from the coastal resorts of the Fleurieu Peninsula.

There were calls at the Forum for an overall transport strategy for metropolitan Adelaide. My contribution was that any such strategy, to be effective, would need to be strongly supported by the financial and other mechanisms for implementing it.

Australian state governments do not appear to question that public transport is a “good thing”. There is clearly still considerable debate about the balance between roading and public transport expenditure, but public transport does not need to justify itself on roading’s terms. The debate appears to be about “how much” of a good thing – public transport – to have, rather than getting stuck, as seems to have been the case in New Zealand in recent times, at the point of “what is the justification for public transport?”

6.2 **Franchising**

In Melbourne the issue of most interest to us is the progress of the new tram and train franchises, which were established last year. The first trainset refurbished by the French-based franchisee Connex was shown to conference delegates. Connex has committed to refurbishing or replacing its entire fleet of emu stock by 2004. Similarly both tram companies have placed orders for European low-floor trams, the first to enter service in 2001. (It is noticeable that all of Melbourne’s trams, which despite mostly having been placed in service between the mid-1970s and the early 1990s, have very poor access by today’s standards. Trams are noticeably slow to load and unload at stops as a consequence. The other notable factor is that, although the trams have exclusive right of way or “fairways” over much of the network, they have little or no priority at intersections, with the result that journey times are much slower than they might be).

Given the announcements at Tranz Rail which were made during the course of the conference, the different political environment between the Australian states and New Zealand has again been highlighted. The franchising of the rail services in Victoria was handled very differently from the rail privatisation in New Zealand. (It differs from that in the UK in that the franchises are vertically integrated. They each include both infrastructure and operation of services, although that for the country passenger services (most of which are long distance commuter services) is slightly different in that it is subject to an access agreement with the freight operator). The franchising process was very “hands-on” on the part of the Government, in contrast to the privatisation here. This contrast is very pronounced now, given that the public interest, as represented by this Council and agencies of central Government, has little effective control over the outcome of Tranz Rail’s divestment process.

6.3 **Ticketing Systems**

In both Adelaide and Melbourne, I made extensive use of the integrated ticketing systems. Adelaide’s is now due for replacement whereas Melbourne’s is new; both require passengers to validate their ticket each time they board a bus, tram or train. Most passengers presumably have valid tickets, but in practice few people validate them because there is no apparent need or incentive for them to do so. Patronage data must therefore be “consistently wrong” at best! Neither system is what we would specify for Wellington. For the user, however, the benefits are very obvious. It is to be hoped that we will soon find a cost-effective means of implementing a workable system, and will be brave enough to bear the risk which will be inevitable in the first year or so until the ultimate revenue implications of a new fare structure are known and understood.

6.4 **Branding**

In Adelaide the State Government’s Passenger Transport Board has recently branded its metropolitan activities under the banner “Adelaide Metro”, since the former TransAdelaide brand remained with the operating arm when the former State

Transport Authority was split up. TransAdelaide, having been unsuccessful in the most recent bus tendering round, now operates only the four-line heavy rail system and the single reserved track tramway (which has a “heritage” fleet of tramcars which last year celebrated their 70th birthday – our English Electric units are spring chickens by comparison!).

Adelaide Metro is packaged very attractively with colourful street timetable displays, interchanges and park and ride facilities, and a particularly well presented shopfront information centre on one of the CBD’s most prominent street corners. All buses, regardless of operator, are being repainted in the same colour scheme.

By contrast, Melbourne’s strong “The Met” brand is being downgraded in favour of each operator’s brand, and separate brands for the ticketing system (Metcard) and the timetable website (VicTrip).

6.5 **Bus Manufacturing**

I went on a field trip to the Volgren bus manufacturing plant – one of Australia’s largest – at Dandenong near Melbourne. It has recently secured a 12 year contract to build 800 buses for Perth, for which it is building a new factory in WA. Unfortunately for us, the cost of a standard low-floor city bus is in the order of \$330,000 Australian – about \$430,000 at current exchange rates. Our local bus builders may be quite unable at present to meet the demand for new buses but at least they are cost effective, with prices generally less than two thirds of the Australian price!

7. **Recommendations**

That the report be received and the information noted.

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Attachments : 2