

Report 11.118
Date 11 March 2011
File T/21/04/01

Committee Economic Wellbeing Committee
Author Wayne Hastie, General Manager, Public Transport

Muri Station

1. Purpose

To consider the future operation of passenger rail services at Muri Station in view of the risk assessment report prepared for KiwiRail.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Background

At its meeting of 30 July 2009, the Transport and Access Committee received a report on Muri Railway Station (Report 09.445). The Committee received and noted the report, which described some of the safety issues at the Station and the potential cost of resolving them, including decommissioning the Station.

Since the 2009 Committee meeting KiwiRail had an independent risk assessment undertaken of Muri Station. The risk assessment identified sixty-three overall hazards related to the Station. Some of the key hazards identified were:

- Excessive platform gaps, the worst on the Wellington network
- Inadequate platform lighting
- A wooden platform section that is suffering significant decay and provides minimal protection to falls from height
- Structural defects, possibly from subsidence
- Unauthorised station access points (including across live tracks) that seem to have become the norm for station access and egress

- Extremely limited disabled access capability.

Following the receipt of the report, KiwiRail wrote to Greater Wellington saying that it agreed with the general conclusions of the risk report, and providing comments on the four potential options that had been identified. A copy of the letter is included as **Attachment 1**.

3.1 Options

The four options identified to deal with the safety issues at Muri Station and the cost of implementing each option are:

- Option 1** Do Nothing – no cost
- Option 2** Fully re-develop the Station - \$1.0m - \$1.3m
- Option 3** Partially re-develop the Station - \$0.6m - \$0.75m
- Option 4** Closure - \$0.1m - \$0.2m

3.2 Consultation

KiwiRail presented the findings of the risk report to representatives from Greater Wellington, Porirua City Council and the Pukerua Bay Residents' Association. In addition, Greater Wellington Councillors and officers have met with the Residents' Association on several occasions to hear their views on the proposals. Written feedback has been received from a number of residents and the Pukerua Bay Residents' Association. This feedback is included within **Attachment 2**.

3.3 Discussion

- Option 1** Do Nothing

The option of doing nothing will not eliminate any of the hazards that have been identified at the Station. This option is not acceptable to KiwiRail who might be open to prosecution under both the Railways Act 2005 and the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 should a safety incident occur. Greater Wellington officers agree with KiwiRail that this option is unacceptable, and that some action is required.

- Option 2** Fully re-develop the Station

While rebuilding the Station to bring it closer to modern safety standards is possible, the fact of its location on a curve, with track centre-lines close together, means that there would always be a substantial gap between the train and the platform.

At an estimated cost of \$1.0m - \$1.3m, full redevelopment of the Station is an expensive option. While there might be some disagreement about the exact number of people using the Station on a regular basis there is no doubt that patronage is extremely low relative to most other Stations on the network. And

Muri Station is only 0.88km along the line of the railway track to the north of the newly re-furbished Pukerua Bay Station.

Within the current upgrade programme there has been insufficient funding to bring all of the platforms and station on the network up to the desirable standard. Priority has been given to stations and platforms that:

1. require essential track clearance works to allow the safe passage of the new trains, and
2. warrant an increased level of passenger safety and security based on the current condition and peak commuter patronage.

While it was initially thought that platform work was required at Muri to provide clearance, it was found that this could be achieved at little cost through track realignment. The low peak commuter patronage at the Station meant that it did not rank highly enough to be funded for further work.

Under the proposed new rail operating model, the Crown remains responsible for the core rail network which includes platforms. Funding for improvements would need to come out of track access charges or by direct appropriation from the Government. In our view there is no prospect of the Crown funding the improvements necessary and as can be seen from the attached letter, given the issues facing the network, KiwiRail considers there are better uses for rail investment than spending on Muri.

Option 3 Partially re-develop the station

Some cost savings can be achieved over Option 2 through a partial re-development of the Station. The current wooden platform extension could be decommissioned limited the station to a maximum 6-car operation; this would however leave it as an orphan on the Kapiti Line where all other platforms are designed for 8 car sets. Reducing it further to say a 4 car platform might reduce total costs, although demolition and removal costs would increase, but simply makes it more of an orphan. In addition, in the medium term the aim is that all peak services are provided by 6-car trains, so no peak services would be able to stop at Muri.

While partially re-developing the station gets rid of the worst of the stepping distances, it does mean the 6 car train is a very tight fit with the platform. KiwiRail considered either building around 8m of new platform to compensate for the loss of the previously wooden area and/or Muri specific door opening instructions or over-ride in place (noting that with Matangi, passengers open the doors on demand).

KiwiRail are particularly concerned about the prospect of locking off certain doors for trains operating at Muri. While this is technically possible, it would require train staff to lock off/unlock doors for every service that stops at Muri, remembering that the Matangi trains have passenger operated doors, as does the refurbished GanzMavag prototype. This variation to the standard operating procedures on the electric network carries some risks:

- the doors are not locked off and someone exits the train at a point where there is no platform
- the doors are not unlocked before the train reaches the next station with a resultant delay for those passengers boarding or exiting the train (remembering that it is only a short distance to Pukerua Bay station for southbound trains).

As the rail operator, KiwiRail are strongly opposed to adopting this type of operation at Muri. The fact that regular train users will know which cars to exit from does not remove the risk as the station is open to all train users.

Further, other remedial works costing \$0.6m - \$0.75m are still required to improve lighting, access and surface condition.

Even at the reduced costs KiwiRail's position remains that there are better uses for rail investment than spending on Muri.

Option 4 Closure

If major re-development of the Station is not undertaken, then KiwiRail are of the view that closing Muri is a suitable option.

3.4 The future

There is not intention to remove the existing concrete platforms at Muri. It would therefore be possible at a future date to undertake the necessary works and restore the operation of the station should the demand reach a point where the investment is considered warranted.

Effectively, "closure" should be considered in terms of an indefinite withdrawal of services, something that can be reversed at some future date.

3.5 Impact of withdrawal of services

The impact of withdrawing services from Muir station is that current users will have to make alternative travel arrangements or catch the train at the nearby Pukerua Bay station. While the Residents' Association have pointed out some of the access issues to some users, others who currently cross SH1 to access Muri will have the safer option of crossing at wooden pedestrian over bridge to access Pukerua Bay station.

KiwiRail investigated the possibility of creating a new pathway within the rail corridor but found that there was insufficient space along the length of the track for this to be a practical option.

It is recommended that Greater Wellington continue to work with Porirua City Council in consultation with the Residents' Association to look at ways in which the walking access to Pukerua Bay station might be improved.

3.6 Timing

It is recommended that services be withdrawn from the Muri station at 30 April 2010. This will give sufficient time for existing users to be informed and for them to be able to make alternative travel arrangements.

4. Communication

All submitters will be notified of the decision of the Committee and it will be publicised through the Metlink website, notices at the station and through advertisements.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. **Receives** the report.*
- 2. **Notes** the content of the report.*
- 3. **Agrees** to indefinitely withdraw rail services from Muri Station from 30 April 2011 because of safety concerns.*
- 4. **Agrees** to continue to work with Porirua City Council in consultation with the Pukerua Bay Residents' Association to look at ways in which the walking access to Pukerua Bay Station might be improved.*

Report prepared by:

Wayne Hastie
General Manager, Public
Transport

Attachment 1: KiwiRail letter

Attachment 2: Written feedback on proposals