

8 February 2023

File Ref: OIAP-7-26967

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for information 2023-005

I refer to your request for information dated 9 January, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 9 January. You have requested the following:

1. *“Notes, minutes and other documentation from Metlink and GWRC providing documentation for the basis for this conclusion, including details of anticipated loading requirements for the reduced schedule, alternatives considered, bus capacity calculations and any other information relating to service provision*
2. *Documentation as to the reduced service provision and the availability of driver resources that enabled demonstration that this would provide “customers certainty” and help operators “meet demand”*
3. *Documentation on calculations indicating the net anticipated reduction in unplanned cancellations*
4. *Documentation on how the reduced service levels during the week is being applied to contracts undertaken with bus operators NZ Bus & Tranzurban compared to contracts undertaken by the council This includes the extent of reductions to be made over the period in payments from the parties for the services provided.*
5. *Considerations made and signed off on towards the impact on passengers and drivers for the increased crowding on buses, the lack of requirement for masking and the potential spread of Covid-19 and other air-borne diseases*
6. *Comparison of bus patronage in January as anticipated as compared to patronage in January 2022, 2019 (prior to Covid) and any earlier years, especially prior to the ill-fated changes in schedules and services brought in.*

7. *Information documenting the number of cancelled bus schedules for the 81 and 83 bus scheduled for the past 12 months*
8. *Any other information relevant to my situation.”*

Greater Wellington’s response follows:

Background

From 4 – 27 January 2023, Metlink delivered a ‘Saturday plus’ timetable on weekdays that affected the majority of bus services in Wellington city and Porirua. The decision to run a ‘Saturday plus’ timetable for January was made in response to the ongoing driver shortage, and to reduce its impact on both drivers and customers. Running the ‘Saturday plus’ timetable allowed bus drivers to take leave and allowed more surety for customers by reducing unplanned cancellations on the network. However, we understand that the revised timetable and capacity issues affecting certain services had negative impacts on some commuters during the month of January.

The current state does not reflect the service level Greater Wellington would ideally be providing and we are actively working alongside our bus operators to improve the situation. However, there are a number of ongoing challenges that we face, of which the most pressing is the workforce shortage (which is industry-wide and does not just affect Metlink and Wellington bus operators). In particular, the driver shortage makes it difficult to operate the public transport network to a level that we would consider to be efficient and effective.

Metlink has undertaken a number of steps to address driver workforce issues—acknowledging that these issues are multi-faceted and will likely require time and further work to get to a desired level. Working alongside our bus operators, we have taken the following actions:

- Greater Wellington has stepped in where necessary to aid recruitment and retention, which includes ushering in rest and meal breaks, embarking on a programme of driver rest facility upgrades, bringing in a Living Wage, topping up wages to \$27 per hour, and reorganising timetables to remove many split-shifts.
- Greater Wellington has been working with Central Government to usher in fair pay agreements, a set of standards that nationally recognise the workforce—with pay rates that can be targeted to city, suburban and rural duties.
- More recently, we have worked with Central Government on immigration to get a regular recruitment pipeline back in place, without eroding existing pay and conditions here in New Zealand. We are making great progress in engaging with operators, drivers, and unions. We will continue to advocate to central government for assistance to address the driver shortage and continue to review our network to make improvements.

- Kinetic, the new owners of NZ Bus (one of the four Wellington bus operators), have an overseas recruitment campaign underway and 100 suitable candidates have accepted offers of employment.
- NZ Bus is also increasing domestic recruitment activities in the region and will be undertaking a series of recruitment advertising campaigns and direct targeting initiatives over the next two months to supplement the overall recruitment focus.

Being able to deliver an effective reliable service to our customers is at the heart of the work we do. We will continue to work with our bus operators and other stakeholders to reinvigorate the driver workforce and improve current levels of service.

The use of 'Saturday plus' timetables

A 'Saturday plus' timetable combines the Saturday timetable (which is lower frequency), with most peak only week-day services added. Over-all it is approximately a 22% reduction in service compared to the current week-day timetable.

'Saturday plus' timetables have only been used on a small number of rare occasions due to exceptional circumstances major disruptions (ie. recently Covid alert levels/mass cancellations).

Given the circumstances and relatively short timeframes to respond to driver shortages, 'Saturday plus' was proposed in September 2022 as one of a number of contingencies that could alleviate the extraordinary level of driver shortages being experienced at the time and continuing through October, November and December 2022.

'Saturday plus' was introduced through January as a 'quick fix' to overcome temporary issues relating to capacity. It is a quick fix because the timetable is already largely established in the systems we use and can be published relatively quickly without requiring weeks of analysis and timetable redesign work. It is also a change that bus operators (NZ Bus & Tranzurban) can quickly implement using existing driver rosters (Weekday school term, Weekday school holidays, Saturdays & Sundays), without having to create new driver duty rosters and negotiate those changes with their workforce, another process which can take several weeks.

The reduced timetable was intended to provide more certainty about the timetable for customers and to provide an opportunity for the driver workforce to take a rest after a busy year and to use their leave entitlements.

The assumption was that this level of service would align with the lower patronage levels typically experienced over January, of approximately between 40% and 75% – which in most locations is correct.

The impact on some specific localities and routes were under-estimated. This caused significantly longer wait times at some points in the network and prevented some customers from boarding buses due to buses being full. This included routes that service Khandallah and Ngaio (Routes 24,25,26), Eastbourne (Route 83), Island Bay (Routes 1, 32x), Wilton and Wadestown (Route 14), Owhiro Bay and Southgate (Routes 29,39), Kingston and Kowhai Park (Routes 7, 17), Miramar Heights and Evans Bay (Route 24), Johnsonville West and Churton Park (Route 1).

If required again in the future, a 'Saturday plus' timetable would need to be refined to provide adequate capacity to the areas where demand was not previously met.

Response to your questions:

Notes, minutes and other documentation from Metlink and GWRC providing documentation for the basis for this conclusion, including details of anticipated loading requirements for the reduced schedule, alternatives considered, bus capacity calculations and any other information relating to service provision

The 'Saturday plus' timetable was proposed in September 2022 as one of several contingencies that could alleviate the extraordinary level of driver shortages being experienced and continuing through October, November, and December 2022.

The decision to implement the 'Saturday plus' timetable was agreed at a Metlink Senior Management level as it was an operational issue. There is no formal documentation or Council approval for this decision-making process. This part of your request is therefore refused under section 17(e) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act) on the basis that the documentation alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

Documentation as to the reduced service provision and the availability of driver resources that enabled demonstration that this would provide "customers certainty" and help operators "meet demand"

The assumption was that the 'Saturday plus' timetable level of service would align with the lower patronage levels typically experienced over January, of approximately between 40% and 75% – which in most locations is correct.

Metlink does not have specific documentation in relation to the above and therefore we are refusing this part of your request for information under section 17(e) of the Act in that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

Documentation on calculations indicating the net anticipated reduction in unplanned cancellations
'Saturday plus' was introduced through January without requiring weeks of analysis and timetable redesign work as it involved a restructuring of existing driver rosters and timetable without having to create new driver duty rosters and negotiate those changes with their workforce.

As we do not have the documentation requested, we are refusing this part of your request for information under section 17(e) of the Act on the basis that the document alleged to contain the information requested does not exist or, despite reasonable efforts to locate it, cannot be found.

Documentation on how the reduced service levels during the week is being applied to contracts undertaken with bus operators NZ Bus & Tranzurban compared to contracts undertaken by the council This includes the extent of reductions to be made over the period in payments from the parties for the services provided.

The contracts between Greater Wellington and Tranzurban and NZ Bus do reflect the reduction in services in line with our Bus Partnering Contract. The Timetable Change Process (**Attachment 1**) applies when changes to the Timetable are made. Changes to payments is reflected in the Timetable Change Process document and where there is a reduction in services, there is a reduction in pay and a variation to the contract is undertaken.

Considerations made and signed off on towards the impact on passengers and drivers for the increased crowding on buses, the lack of requirement for masking and the potential spread of Covid-19 and other air-born diseases

The protocols we follow in relation to public health measures are advised by the Ministry of Health. Overcrowding is not our standard level of service. Each bus has an acceptable passenger load, and it is the responsibility of the bus driver to maintain this.

Comparison of bus patronage in January as anticipated as compared to patronage in January 2022, 2019 (prior to Covid) and any earlier years, especially prior to the ill-fated changes in schedules and services brought in.

To ensure the comparison is accurately reflected, the data we have for January is from January 1 – 19 for both the 2019, 2022, and 2023 years.

Bus patronage for 2019 was 879,786. In 2022 (during the Covid-19 Protection Framework – Orange) it was 683,472. In 2023, it was 739,126.

Information documenting the number of cancelled bus schedules for the 81 and 83 bus scheduled for the past 12 months

Please see **Attachment 2** which presents the cancellations for routes 81 and 83 over the last 12 months, plus January to date.

Any other information relevant to my situation.

If you would like to see monthly data we do provide this information on the Metlink website at: [metlink.org.nz/news-and-updates/surveys-and-reports/performance-of-our-network/#DataAndReports](https://www.metlink.org.nz/news-and-updates/surveys-and-reports/performance-of-our-network/#DataAndReports). This is updated every 3rd – 4th week of the following month. We expect that the January report will be available on the website by the end of February.

When refusing under section 17(e) we are required to consider consulting you. In this instance, we do not believe that consulting would remove the reason for the refusal of the parts of your request refused under this ground.

If you have any concerns with the decision(s) referred to in this letter, you have the right to request an investigation and review by the Ombudsman under section 27(3) of the Act.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Our response to your request will be published shortly on Greater Wellington's website with your personal information removed.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Samantha Gain
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