

5 May 2023

File Ref: OIAPR-1274023063-13

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for information 2023-073

I refer to your request for information dated 4 April 2023, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 4 April 2023. You have requested the following:

“What is the process for a Metlink/GWRC call centre staff member to escalate a customer complaint when they are contacted via Twitter, contact centre or Facebook?”

- *How frequently do the Service Delivery meet as a team/or alternatively with the contact centre staff to discuss existing issues raised directly from the aforementioned customer complaints?*
- *What is the mechanism in which the Service Delivery meet with the Operators, and how frequently are these meetings taking place?*
- *Are GWRC/Metlink minutes taken at these meetings?*
- *Are Metlink in frequent daily "real time" communication with the operators as issues arise?*
- *Would the cancelation for four back-to-back hourly services, providing no Public Transport to a community be considered an issue to try and solve on the day?*
- *Would GWRC/Metlink agree that rate payers deserve better than to frequently have four-hour periods without a service (see [Wellington's most cancelled bus routes | RNZ News](#)) as has happened on at least 4 occasions in the last in the last 2 weeks on the number 27 route is unacceptable?*
- *These (no service for four hours) periods on the #27 have happened whereby the number 7 bus has run with perhaps one out of 4 or 5 buses cancelled. Do GWRC/Metlink believe that there is at least some merit in the Service Team at least discussing this issue with the Operators, to ensure a more equitable service?”*

Greater Wellington's response follows:

1. What is the process for a Metlink/GWRC call centre staff member to escalate a customer complaint when they are contacted via Twitter, contact centre or Facebook?

All Metlink feedback is logged in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, 'Resolve'. The Contact Centre team decide whether complaints need to be escalated based on the guidance received.

Attachment 1 contains the Complaints Process Overview. The Customer Care team review cases and update the status as needed.

Attachment 2 is the step by step guide our Contact Centre staff follow when interacting with a customer who either wishes to lay a complaint or provide some feedback. This guide applies whether the interaction is over the phone, in an email or via social media.

Attachment 3 gives further information on the various steps in the feedback process and the role each party plays in it.

2. How frequently do the Service Delivery meet as a team/or alternatively with the contact centre staff to discuss existing issues raised directly from the aforementioned customer complaints?

The Service Delivery Team have a series of set meetings. They have a daily 'toolbox' meeting which is scheduled for 25 minutes, as well as a weekly meeting which is scheduled for one hour. Representatives of the Service Delivery and Contact Centre teams meet as required.

3. What is the mechanism in which the Service Delivery meet with the Operators, and how frequently are these meetings taking place?

The Service Delivery Team meet weekly with our public transport operators. The agenda of these meetings is guided in the Public Transport Operating Model Partnering Agreements. A representative Agreement is available for public viewing on our website: <https://www.gw.govt.nz/transport/metlink-bus-train-and-ferry/bus-contracts/>

Information on meetings is contained in Schedule 5: 'Planning, Reporting and Meetings' <https://www.metlink.org.nz/assets/Contracts/Schedules-2-15-Nov-22.pdf>

4. Are GWRC/Metlink minutes taken at these meetings?

This is dependent on the purpose of each meeting, and the nature or importance of any items or issues discussed at each meeting. Minutes may include actions only, or brief descriptive minutes or, in cases where no substantive issues have been raised, there may be no record taken.

5. Are Metlink in frequent daily "real time" communication with the operators as issues arise?

Depending on the issue, Metlink officers do discuss issues with operators in real time. These issues are more likely to be significant service disruptions, or other incident events. Details on our interactions with the operators for such events can be found in the representative Agreement on our website, in the section: 'Service Disruptions' <https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2022/05/Schedules-2-15-for-publication.pdf>

6. Would the cancelation for four back-to-back hourly services, providing no Public Transport to a community be considered an issue to try and solve on the day?

Metlink holds a trusted partnership relationship with our public transport operators. Metlink officers support and trust our public transport operators' industry expertise to manage their businesses. While Metlink officers are not involved in the real-time decision-making process, these decisions may be raised in the meetings described above. We request that operators always prioritise school trips and, where applicable, first and last trips on a timetable. We do not believe that sequential trips should be cancelled, however we believe that our operators would have considered other options and made the best decision.

7. Would GWRC/Metlink agree that rate payers deserve better than to frequently have four-hour periods without a service (see [Wellington's most cancelled bus routes | RNZ News](#)) as has happened on at least 4 occasions in the last in the last 2 weeks on the number 27 route is unacceptable?

Metlink officers regret that the current national bus driver shortage is impacting service levels to the extent that it is, and that this effects our customers. Please note the article from RNZ has since been updated as it contained some incorrect data for certain routes that were not serviced on the weekends. The up-to-date article has been listed here: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/cancelled/487484/metlink-says-it-has-overstated-the-number-of-cancelled-bus-services-in-wellington>.

Attachment 4 is a report which was provided to Council on 30 March 2023. In this report, we provide some more context to the ongoing bus driver shortages and how we are working to improve the quality of our services by recruiting more overseas drivers, increasing driver wages, and improving working conditions.

8. These (no service for four hours) periods on the #27 have happened whereby the number 7 bus has run with perhaps one out of 4 or 5 buses cancelled. Do GWRC/Metlink believe that there is at least some merit in the Service Team at least discussing this issue with the Operators, to ensure a more equitable service?

Metlink officers discuss a wide range of options with operators to reduce cancelled services and the impact on our customers. Metlink officers frequently discuss these issues with our operators. Unfortunately, the operating environment with the national shortage of bus drivers means that there is often not an equitable solution in addressing these issues.

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 Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.

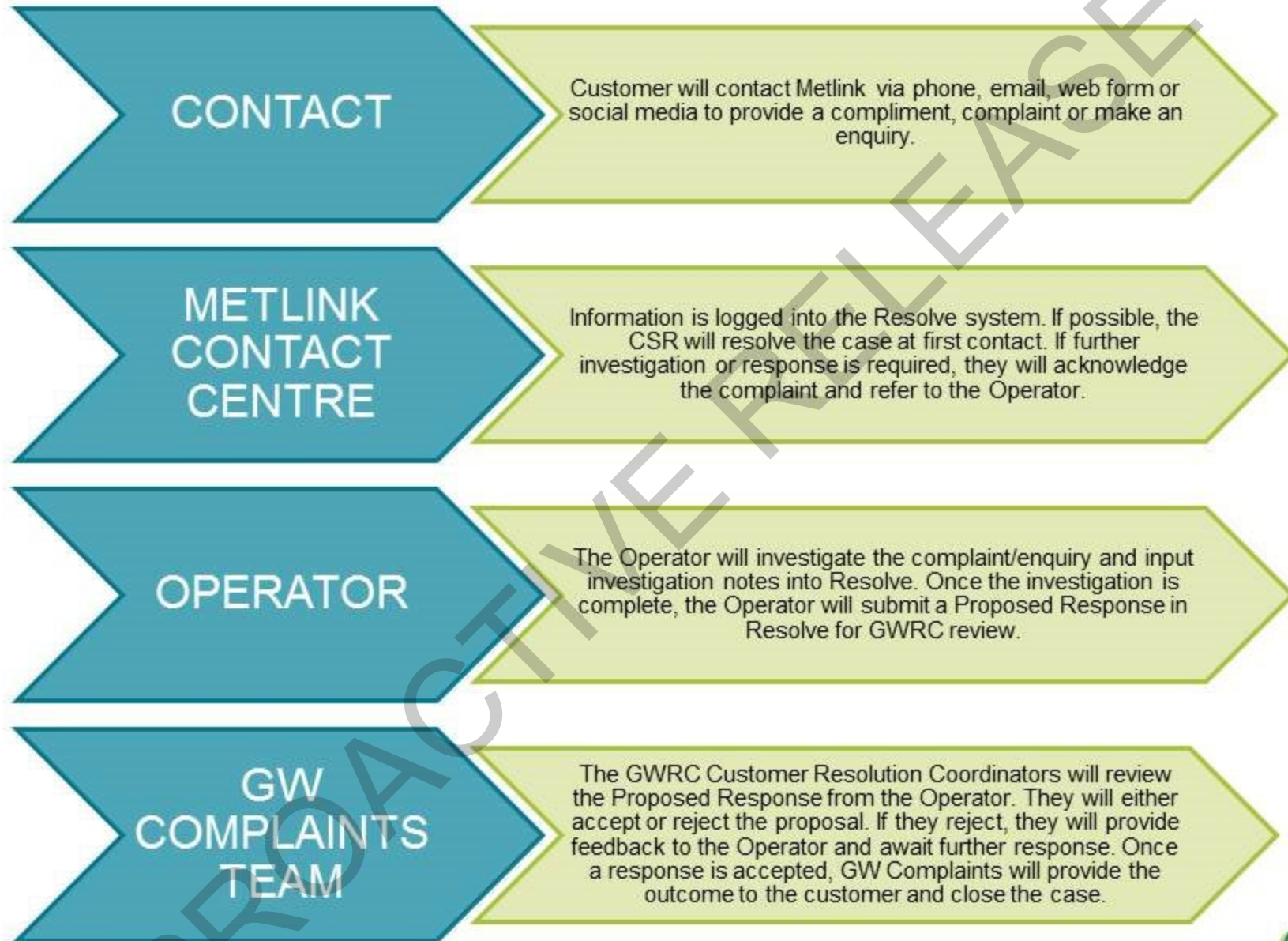
Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Our response to your request will be published shortly on Greater Wellington's website with your personal information removed.

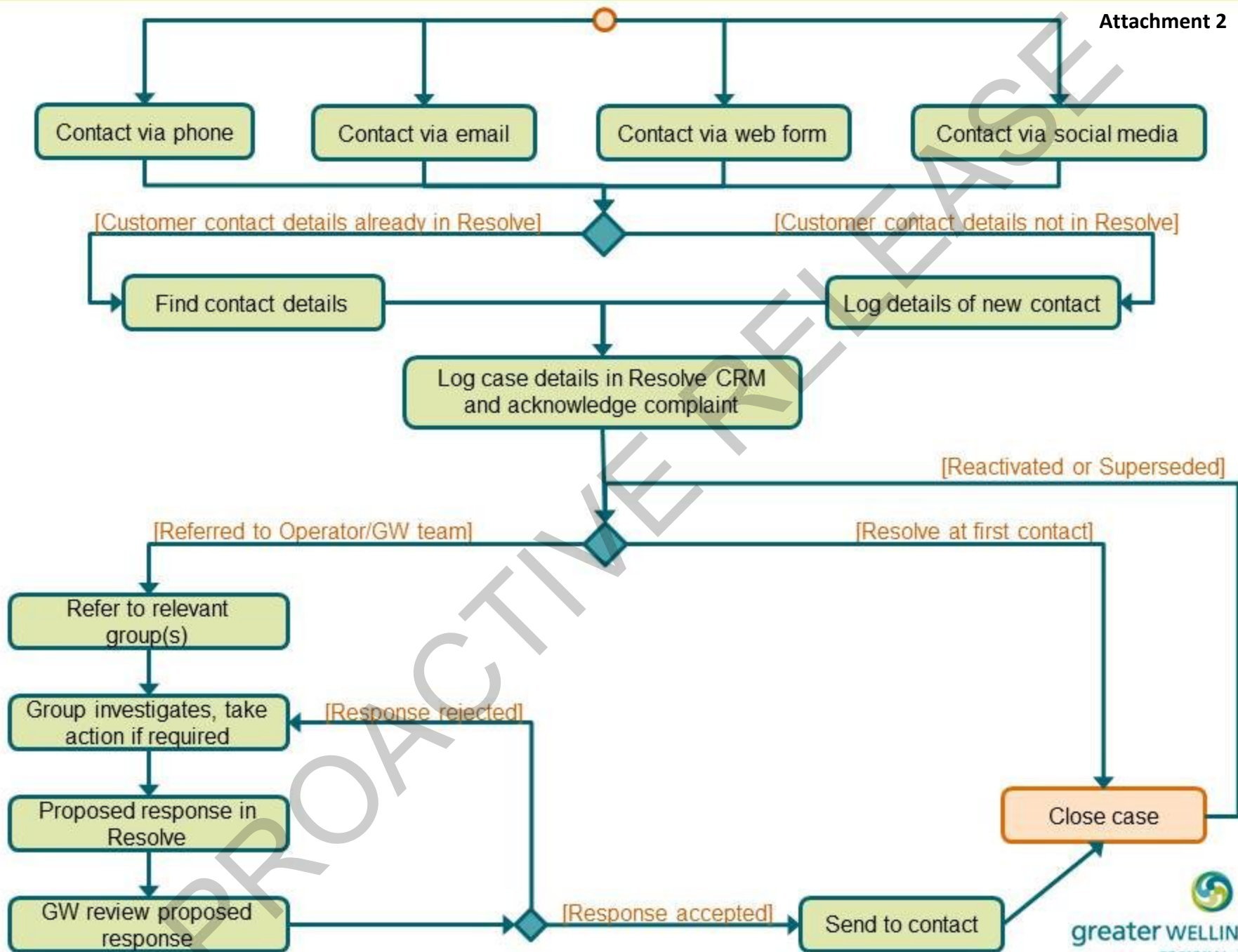
Nāku iti noa, nā



Samantha Gain

Kaiwhakahaere Matua Waka-ā-atea | General Manager Metlink





This is a step by step guide on the recommended structure of a phone interaction where a customer is wishing to provide feedback about a Metlink service or a GW enquiry.

STEPS

Greeting

- Kia ora/Mōrena/Tēnā koe
- Welcome to Metlink
- You're speaking with (agents name)

Allow the customer to explain their concerns

- Allow the customer to speak and just listen.
- Remain calm.
- Do not interrupt or ask the customer to calm down.
- Concentrate on what the customer is saying, use your active listening skills.
- Take notes.

Outcome – In most cases the customer will calm down after venting their concerns/frustration.

Offer empathy and understanding

- Before asking for any details that you may need to process the complaint, always offer the appropriate amount of empathy and understanding.
- Imagine what the experience may have been like for the customer.
- Express your understanding to the customer and apologise.
- Paraphrase from your notes taken earlier to show that you understand the situation and have been listening.
- This is a good time to develop some rapport with the customer.

Outcome – The customer feels they have been listened to and understood.

Explain to the customer how you are going to help

- Talk the customer through the steps needed to resolve the customers concerns.
- Explain why it's the best way to resolve or address the issue.

- Use simple language and avoid using 'shop' words or jargon. For example a customer does not know what 'Resolve' or 'Horizon' are.
- Be positive and sound confident.
- Focus on the solution.
- Go the extra mile to do what you can to solve the customers concerns straightaway if possible.

Outcome – The customer is confident that their feedback is being taken seriously and will be resolved.

Ask the customer for the required details

- Gather all the information required to either resolve the issue over the phone or log with the appropriate team for further investigation.
- It's important to take the time to get this right, otherwise it could delay an investigation for the customer.

Outcome – A Resolve case is completed correctly. The relevant team or operator are able to investigate the complaint as quickly as possible. It's possible the issue could be resolved during the phone conversation.

Provide a summary and explain the next steps

- Summarise the customers concerns and remind the customer how their feedback is going to be resolved.
- Explain the process, and the next steps.
- If the feedback requires a follow up response from another team, provide the customer with the case number if relevant to the type of feedback.

Outcome – Customer is reassured and confident that their issue will be resolved.

Close the call

- Express again your understanding of the customers concerns and apologise once again for the experience.
- Invite the customer to get in touch again if they have any other concerns.
- Do what you say you are going to do – complete the Resolve case correctly.

Council
30 March 2023
Report 23.94



For Decision

UPLIFT IN BUS DRIVER WAGES

Te take mō te pūrongo

Purpose

1. To seek Council approval to increase base rates paid to Metlink Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) bus drivers from 1 April 2023 in accordance with a Government funding offer.

He tūtohu

Recommendations

That Council:

- 1 **Notes** that as part of Budget 2022, the Government funded through the Climate Emergency Response Fund (CERF) \$61 million nationally over four years to improve recruitment and retention of bus drivers.
- 2 **Notes** that CERF funding can be used to further increase wages up to \$30/hr in urban areas and up to \$28/hr in regional areas.
- 3 **Notes** that in order to access CERF funding, bus operators must agree to increase wages to at least match the future wage indexation, on an ongoing basis, and all parties (Greater Wellington/Metlink, bus operators, unions and Waka Kotahi) must agree to the changes and sign a Memorandum of Understanding to this effect.
- 4 **Agrees** that for the purposes of CERF funding, Wairarapa (operated by Tranzurban) and Kāpiti (operated by Uzabus) are to be considered 'regional', with all other areas in the Region are to be considered 'urban'.
- 5 **Agrees** to fully utilise the available funding by increasing bus driver pay rates to an average of \$30/hr for 'urban' and \$28/hr for 'regional'.
- 6 **Agrees** to implement the increased pay rates in the manner set out at paragraphs 21 and 22 of this report.
- 7 **Notes** that bus operators will be eligible to claim the additional funding from 1 April 2023 subject to the Memorandum of Understanding being agreed.
- 8 **Notes** that the funding required to support the additional payments to Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) bus operators from 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023 is \$688,000 and that Greater Wellington's share is able to be met from within existing budgets.

- 9 **Notes** that the estimated total funding required to support the additional payments to PTOM bus operators is \$2,227,000 for the 2023/24 financial year and that Greater Wellington's share is included in the 2023/24 Annual Plan budget, and will be included in the next LTP budget for subsequent years.

Te tāhū kōrero

Background

Bus Driver shortage, and employment conditions

2. There is a national worker shortage, including a shortage of bus drivers. In the Wellington region, we have a shortage of approximately 125 drivers out of a full complement of 650 (see report 23.11).
3. The national worker shortage highlighted the shortfall in wages and conditions for bus drivers, resulting in higher churn and lower recruitment rates. Recognising the importance of a wider range of issues, Metlink has undertaken the following key actions in an effort to alleviate the impacts of frontline staff workforce shortages:
 - a **Funded wage increases:** Metlink has played a key role in the discussions on Living Wage with our partners and stakeholders. All bus operators across the Metlink network now pay their drivers at a minimum an average of \$27 an hour.
 - b **Lobbied Government to change immigration rules:** Councillors and officers have actively lobbied for changes to immigration rules. Immigration rules have changed, now making it easier for our operators to bring in drivers from overseas.
 - c **Improved driver conditions:** Other Metlink initiatives support the continued improvement of driver conditions: Split shifts and part-time shifts have been reduced (by increasing interpeak frequencies); Driver facilities (toilets and rest areas) are being improved on a continual basis; Roll-out of free sanitary and incontinence products for bus and rail staff at key locations across the network.

Climate Emergency Response Fund

4. As part of Budget 2022, the Government funded, through the Climate Emergency Response Fund (CERF), \$61 million nationally over four years to improve recruitment and retention of bus drivers.
5. The CERF Fund is able to be used to contribute towards funding:
 - a Further wage increases up to \$30/hr in urban areas and up to \$28/hr in regional areas; and/or
 - b Shift allowances/penal rates (if necessary).
6. The CERF Fund is subject to the following terms being met:
 - a Public Transport Authorities (e.g. Greater Wellington/Metlink) must provide local share funding to match Crown funding
 - b Bus operators must agree to increase wages to at least match the future wage indexation, on an ongoing basis
 - c All parties (Greater Wellington/Metlink, bus operators, unions and Waka Kotahi) must agree to the changes and sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

7. The determination of what constitutes a 'regional' or 'urban' area rests with Public Transport Authorities (e.g. Greater Wellington/Metlink).

PTOM Bus Partnering Agreements

8. The PTOM Bus Partnering Agreements do not enable Greater Wellington to direct the base rates paid by PTOM bus operators to PTOM bus drivers.

Current bus driver minimum pay rates in the Wellington Region

9. During 2021/22 Metlink provided funding to bus operators to enable them to increase the minimum bus driver base or average rates to \$27 per hour.

Fair Pay Agreements Act 2022

10. The Fair Pay Agreements Act 2022 (the FPA Act) took effect on 1 December 2022.
11. The FPA Act is designed to ensure a basic set of minimum standards for all employees in low-wage occupations and industries. It does this by bringing together unions and employer associations within a sector to bargain for a number of minimum employment terms for all of the employees in that industry or occupation.
12. Industry parties are currently participating in a process to establish terms and conditions for all bus drivers in New Zealand under a Fair Pay Agreement.
13. The proposed driver wage increases in this report are independent of the Fair Pay Agreement process, which is expected to take into account this increase as well as address other terms and conditions for bus drivers.

**Te tātaritanga
Analysis**

Utilisation of CERF funding – determination of what funding should be used for

14. Officers consider that the best use of CERF funding is for it to go towards further driver wage increases.
15. It is anticipated that shift allowances/penal rates will be addressed through any Fair Pay Agreements.

Utilisation of CERF funding – determination of regional/urban split

16. Officers have worked with operators to identify whether there are separate geographic areas in the Region which support separate rates.
17. As a result of discussions with operators, officers propose that two geographic areas be considered as 'regional' for the purposes of CERF funding; Wairarapa (Unit 13 - operated by Tranzurban) and Kāpiti (Unit 14 - operated by Uzabus). All other areas in the Region would be considered 'urban'.
18. If Council determines that bus services operated in Wairarapa and Kāpiti areas are 'regional', then they will be eligible for an increase under the CERF fund of up to \$28 per hour.
19. Both Tranzurban and Uzabus support their operations in the Wairarapa and Kāpiti being considered 'regional'.

Utilisation of CERF funding – determination of pay rates

20. Officers propose that Greater Wellington/Metlink fully utilises the available funding by increasing pay rates to an average of \$30/hr for 'urban' areas and \$28/hr for 'regional' areas.
21. For the three operators with flat wage rate agreements, the funding is proposed to be applied as an increase to their current flat wage rate.
22. One of our operators employs drivers under a collective agreement with penal rates and allowances. Funding for this operator will be applied as an equivalent average increase per hour.
23. All four operators and the respective unions support the approach to wage increases set out above.

Memorandum of Understanding

24. Following Council's decision on wage rates, Metlink will work with bus operators, unions and Waka Kotahi to agree to the changes and sign a Memorandum of Understanding as required by Waka Kotahi to access funding.
25. In addition, PTOM Bus Partnering Contracts will be varied to reflect the funding arrangements.

Ngā hua ahumoni**Financial implications**

26. Total funding required for 1 April 2023 to 30 June 2023 is \$688,000 (with 51% of this cost funded by CERF). Greater Wellington's portion of funding required is able to be met from within existing budgets.
27. Total funding required for 2023/24 will be \$2,227,000 (with 51% of this cost funded by CERF). Greater Wellington's portion of funding required has been budgeted for in the 2023/24 draft Annual Plan.

Ngā Take e hāngai ana te iwi Māori**Implications for Māori**

28. This initiative is intended to improve the recruitment and retention of bus drivers, which will, in turn, increase our ability to provide public transport services and meet regional and national emissions reduction targets.
29. Public Transport allows Māori to travel affordably to places such as employment, social services, education, and culturally significant events. Public Transport also aims to decrease the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in the environment which appeals to the protection of the environment which is important in te ao Māori given a special connection to the whenua (land).

Te huritao ki te huringa o te āhuarangi **Consideration of climate change**

30. This initiative has been funded through the CERF in Budget 2022 to support councils to provide a sustainable public transport system and improve public transport choices.
31. Improving the recruitment and retention of bus drivers through more attractive terms and conditions is integral to our ability to achieve Greater Wellington and the Government's decarbonisation goals.

Ngā tikanga whakatau **Decision-making process**

32. The matter requiring decision in this report was considered by officers against the decision-making requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002.

Te hiranga **Significance**

33. Officers considered the significance (as defined by Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002) of the matter, taking into account Council's Significance and Engagement Policy and Greater Wellington's Decision-making Guidelines.
34. Officers consider that the matter is of low significance, on the basis that this decision implements a Government initiative and the financial impacts are low.

Te whakatūtakitaki **Engagement**

35. Officers have engaged with bus operators, unions and Waka Kotahi on the matters covered in this report.

Ngā tūāoma e whai ake nei **Next steps**

36. Subject to Council's decision, officers will work with bus operators, unions and Waka Kotahi to agree the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding
37. Metlink will prepare and execute contract variations with each PTOM Bus operator.

Ngā kaiwaitohu **Signatories**

Writer	Melissa Anderson – Manager, Operations & Partnerships, Metlink
Approver	Samantha Gain – General Manager, Metlink

He whakarāpopoto i ngā huritaonga Summary of considerations
<p><i>Fit with Council or Committee's Terms of Reference</i></p> <p>The Council is required to make a decision on this matter as it relates to funding of public transport.</p>
<p><i>Contribution to Annual Plan / Long Term Plan / Other key strategies and policies</i></p> <p>The proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Public Transport aspects of the 2021-31 Long Term Plan.</p>
<p><i>Internal consultation</i></p> <p>In preparing this report there has been consultation with officers in the Public Transport, Legal and Finance Departments.</p>
<p><i>Risks and impacts - legal / health and safety etc.</i></p> <p>There are no identified legal or health and safety risks arising from the matters in this report.</p>