

9 September 2024

File Ref: OIAPR-1274023063-30087

By email: [REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for information 2024-204

I refer to your request for information dated 19 August 2024, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 19 August 2024. You have requested the following:

"I am writing to request information under the LGOIMA concerning the Metlink report titled "Metlink Buses: Response to Air Quality and Ventilation Concerns and Requests for Action from Customers," dated March 2024, and related initiatives to improve bus ventilation and air quality.

1. The March 2024 report mentions Metlink's advocacy with NZTA Waka Kotahi for a national research project to address passengers' health risks and test control measures for bus ventilation. Can you confirm if this project has commenced?

- Is there additional information about this project, including any documentation or reports outlining its objectives?

- What is the expected timeline for this research project, including anticipated completion dates?

2. What was the outcome of the second fresh air intake prototype test conducted in March 2024 for the double-decker bus model that currently does not enable fresh air intake, as mentioned in the report?

3. The report indicates that 31% of the fleet has fresh air intake capability, but it is not enabled due to the cost of reprogramming the air conditioning systems. What are Metlink's plans regarding enabling fresh air intake in these buses? Is there a timeline for when this might be addressed?

4. Concerning the obstacles to using HEPA filtration mentioned in the March 2024 report:-Has Metlink considered using MERV 13 filters?

- If the current HVAC units cannot accommodate MERV 13 filters, has Metlink explored upgrading to systems that can?

- What are the impediments to upgrading to systems capable of using MERV 13 filters, if any?

5. Will there be an updated report on the progress made by Metlink to address ventilation concerns?"

Greater Wellington's response follows:

1. **Can you confirm if this project has commenced? Is there additional information about this project, including any documentation or reports outlining its objectives? What is the expected timeline for this research project, including anticipated completion dates?**

We formally transferred this part of your request to New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) on 3 September 2024.

2. **What was the outcome of the second fresh air intake prototype test conducted in March 2024 for the double-decker bus model that currently does not enable fresh air intake, as mentioned in the report?**

The second fresh air prototype trial was undertaken in April 2024 using a multi-speed fan. At the highest setting cabin noise was of concern, but a setting was identified where CO² levels were reduced to similar levels to other buses. This has informed our intended approach.

The electric double deck buses were purchased in two tranches, the first 10 have opening windows upstairs and no air conditioning, the remainder don't have opening windows but air conditioning upstairs. The solution prototyped was on one of the first 10 buses, but due to design details on the buses a different installation solution is needed for the buses in the second tranche. We are currently waiting for parts to install this and confirm effectiveness.

3. **The report indicates that 31% of the fleet has fresh air intake capability, but it is not enabled due to the cost of reprogramming the air conditioning systems. What are Metlink's plans regarding enabling fresh air intake in these buses? Is there a timeline for when this might be addressed?**

Greater Wellington has requested that operators alter the air conditioning systems to introduce fresh air where this is possible but are not actively tracking any progress and there is no specific plan. A decision was also made not to pay for adjustments on single deck buses because the CO² levels were at a level we consider acceptable at this stage. Greater Wellington is aware that

we may need to reconsider the matter if standards and targets regarding fresh air intake are introduced by the Ministry of Health or NZTA. Therefore, there is no specific timeline we are working towards. We continue to monitor this for future changes.

Therefore, your request for this information is refused under section 17(g) of the local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act) in that the information requested is not held by the local authority and the person dealing with the request has no grounds for believing that the information is either—

- (i) held by another local authority or a department or Minister of the Crown or organisation; or
- (ii) connected more closely with the functions of another local authority, or a department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

4. Concerning the obstacles to using HEPA filtration mentioned in the March 2024 report:

- **Has Metlink considered using MERV 13 filters?**
- **If the current HVAC units cannot accommodate MERV 13 filters, has Metlink explored upgrading to systems that can?**
- **What are the impediments to upgrading to systems capable of using MERV 13 filters, if any?**

Metlink had not considered using MERV13 filters. We asked our supplier to advise us on this option upon receiving your request. The supplier has advised that a MERV 13 filter would overwhelm the air conditioning system. The supplier uses filters which range between MERV 5 and MERV 7.

The primary impediment to continue investigating the use of MERV13 filters is the cost including sourcing, and installing a new air conditioning system recognising this would also involve the removal of the current system.

5. Will there be an updated report on the progress made by Metlink to address ventilation concerns?

Metlink will produce a report on this matter once there is a confirmed solution to the last models of double deck bus and agreed to be installed by the bus operator to close off this current work. Should NZTA, or the Ministry of Health, provide either an air quality standard or target for urban buses, we will review this to determine what, if any, further improvements are required.

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 appropriate. 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 | Group Manager Metlink

PROACTIVE RELEASE