



NZ Climate & Health Council

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Submission on the Draft Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2014

Greater Wellington Regional Council via email

This submission is written by members of the Executive Board of OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council.

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Our comments on the Draft Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2014 relate mainly to impacts on Climate Change, Health, and Costs.

We are supportive of Greater Wellington Regional Council's (The Council) plans and achievements thus far to enhance public transport in the region. We also appreciate the complicated decision making process to balance the ideal and the practical, while constrained by budget, legislation and other external pressures. We suggest however, that the balance has changed as we rapidly learn more about Climate Change, adverse health effects of motorised transport, and realise that a healthy economy in the middle of this century is going to look very different from the popular perception of economic health in recent decades.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that we need to move away from 'business-as-usual' if we are to have a reasonable chance of remaining below the internationally accepted limit of a 2°C temperature rise by the end of this century, and thus potentially avoid catastrophic changes. If we continue to emit greenhouse gases (GHG) at the current rate, we have a reasonable chance of achieving greater than 4°C rise within the next 80 years; a truly horrifying state to bequeath to today's youngsters.

We therefore need urgent and transformative change in the way we lead our individual lives and how, as a society, we plan infrastructure fit for a prosperous and resilient future.

It is time to drastically cut GHGe and consider ways of sequestering carbon. That means that we do not support diesel buses into the future, and we do not support continued major road building. Major road construction induces vehicular traffic and makes great use of fossil-fuelled machinery and embodied GHGe in the form of materials such as cement. Road widening (eg eating into the Town Belt to the east of the Mt Victoria Tunnel) and construction destroy vegetation which could be developed to sequester carbon and to provide social amenity value. Vegetation can also be managed to absorb more of the anticipated heavy rainfall, and protect from heat and sun exposure.

We are therefore strongly opposed to the current decisions on the Spine Study with Bus Rapid Transit (using diesel), integral to the RoNS Northern Corridor plans.

This is a great opportunity to showcase Greater Wellington as a courageous and innovative leader within New Zealand, and to encourage the rest of NZ to improve its shameful record as a high GHG-emitter.

We support the introduction of electric buses rather than diesel, and strongly support retention and upgrading of the trolley system. We maintain our preference for light rail for the main routes. The gratifying uptake of the other electric trains bodes well for the acceptability and efficiency of a light rail network.

This is a unique time in our history when Greater Wellington and its Council must prepare for our changing climate. We see it as exciting opportunity to move towards a healthy, zero-emission all-electric public transport system in New Zealand's capital city. You will be widely acclaimed for it.

HEALTH

Air pollution is recognised with increasing alarm, as a substantial contributor to acute and chronic ill-health and premature mortality worldwide. Traffic pollution has been linked to childhood asthma and to respiratory and cardiac damage in adults. Diesel fumes contribute to cancer as well as respiratory and cardiac disease. Disappointingly, cleaner diesel technology while reducing some pollutants (such as particulate matter), appears to increase the emission of other harmful gases.

Active transport: walking and cycling bring significant benefits to individual physical and mental health as well as facilitating social cohesion. Globally and in NZ, health services are struggling with the sequelae of inactivity; for example obesity, diabetes, cardiac disease, musculoskeletal disease and depression. Inactivity is fostered by a system which favours or promotes car use (such as RoNS). We recognise the Council's efforts to encourage active transport, but suggest that more strenuous efforts are needed. Active transport would be fostered by separate cycleways, bike carriage on buses, and wide footpaths.

Accidents: Wellington has many brave cyclists, but many have had accidents and/or near-misses with buses or cars. Whoever is at fault, the cyclist usually ends up worst off. Anecdotally, many more Wellingtonians would like to cycle, but consider our city's roads to be unsafe for bikes. It is surprising that the Northern Corridor would have a shared lane for walking, cycling and slow vehicle access along Ruahine Street and Wellington Road. It is particularly difficult to see pedestrians and cyclists from a large vehicle – especially when trying to merge with other traffic. Bigger roads with more vehicles travelling faster beget more accidents as well.

Climate change: our changing climate will itself cause health problems directly and indirectly, so that exacerbating climate change by emitting GHG (as in motorised transport or major construction projects) will in turn exacerbate health problems. Air pollution is aggravated by increasing temperatures as for instance in the formation of ozone as sunlight reacts with vehicle exhaust, to cause acute cardiac damage. Heat stress worsens respiratory, cardiac and renal disease, and large areas of concrete magnify heat intensity and consequent adverse effects. There are many other adverse health impacts of climate change.

In light of rapidly accumulating new evidence about traffic pollution and the urgency of climate change mitigation and adaptation, we repeat our request that the Regional Council carry out a new **Health Impact Assessment** (HIA) prior to making decisions on the region's long term transport. This is necessary in order to comply with the requirements of the Health Act (1956) to look after the Regional Council's communities. The new HIA must include the impacts of transport GHG on our changing climate and health.

Health impacts should not be viewed as a potential externality but rather be part of the holistic development objective of transport projects, which aim to support, among other things, healthy, productive lives (World Bank 2014).

COSTS

At present, more effort is invested in estimating the economic rate of return of road projects than in estimating either the social benefits (access to health care, education, markets) or social harms (burden of disease, environmental costs) of transport. (World Bank 2014)

We are concerned that economic, climate and health considerations appear to be ignored by plans to replace the relatively new electric trolley buses with diesel. The plan and the online submission form both frame retention of electric trolley buses as a 'cost', yet there are no hard data on how much GWRC is attempting to reduce transport emissions (logically based on the latest IPCC AR5 climate reports) over the lifetime of bus investment.

Electric bus economic analysis must include health costs, rising oil costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Retention of electric trolley buses with the capacity to integrate trolley lines with battery charging may well represent considerable savings when contrasted with the climate, oil and health costs of diesel alternatives. We would like the Council to consider China's lead in investing in electric technology

We are alarmed at the prospect of enormous expenditure on infrastructure which will be obviously inappropriate for the needs of Greater Wellington well before 2030, and the potentially missed opportunity to construct a really great system for safe, efficient, and pleasing public and active transport in a forward-looking, coolest little capital.

Actions to reduce emissions, increase carbon uptake, adapt to a changing climate, and increase resilience to impacts that are unavoidable can improve public health, economic development, ecosystem protection, and quality of life. (National Climate Assessment 2014)

We note that NZTA contributes 24% of funding for public transport, and that the agency is keen to reduce peak congestion in Wellington. We could suggest that a more effective use of their resources would be to increase their contribution to fund excellent public and active transport, rather than pouring finances and other resource into RoNS. If the city is made safe for cyclists, and a little less attractive to vehicular traffic, we would expect peak congestion to decrease significantly.

We would like to be heard in the oral submission process

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See pp 51-57 re transport emissions and mitigation.