

AGENDA ITEM NO: (leave blank)	SUBJECT MATTER: STAGE 2 OF THE GREATER CHRISTCHURCH METRO NETWORK POST-EARTHQUAKE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT
REPORT: Council	DATE OF MEETING: 27 September 2012
FILE REFERENCES:	PORTFOLIO: Public Passenger Transport PROGRAMME: Passenger Services Reviews
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COMMISSIONER: Rex Williams	

PURPOSE

To consider the proposed bus routes changes that make up Stage 2 of the Greater Christchurch Metro Network Redevelopment Project.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

BACKGROUND

Following the February 2011 earthquake usage of the Greater Christchurch Metro Network has dropped significantly. From July 2011 to June 2012 11,221,807 trips were recorded, compared to 17,209,745 from July 2009 to June 2010, representing a decline in patronage of 35%. This decline in patronage led to an operating deficit of \$5.5 million in the 2011/12 financial year. Central Government has an expectation that public transport services should recover 50% of their costs from fare revenue, whereas the Greater Christchurch network had a commerciality ratio of 32% in the 2011/12 financial year.

A number of changes have already been made to the Greater Christchurch network in order to reduce operating costs. In 2011, as part of Stage 1 of the Post-Earthquake Network Redevelopment Project, services that performed very poorly prior to the February 2011 earthquake were discontinued, along with services that were unable to resume for a significant period of time due to road damage.

Detail about Stage 2 of the Network Redevelopment Project was included in a report to Council at the meeting on 29 March 2012. This report noted that there were two main options for reshaping the Greater Christchurch Network and reducing operating costs:

Retain the existing network structure and reduce service levels.

Change the network model to a hub and spoke type model to more efficiently service the market at a reduced overall cost.

On 29 March 2012, Council advised that the preferred approach was Option B and approved the planning of further stages of the Network Redevelopment Project. Stage 2 (sometimes referred to as stage 2B) of this project is planned for implementation in late 2012 and is the

subject of this report. It is now planned to introduce the final changes (Stage 3) in the 2014/15 financial year.

The full implementation of the Network Redevelopment Project (Stages 2 and 3) allows the coverage of the network to remain largely unchanged whilst reducing cost through streamlining routes and removing unnecessary route duplication. This involves a reduction in the number of Metro routes which travel to and through the city centre. Services which do not travel to the city centre would connect with those that do at suburban hubs. A network reorganisation of this nature also allows for services to be redesigned to better meet the needs of the 'new' Christchurch, including providing increased access to major new employment locations, and more options for cross-suburban travel.

Routes included in this stage account for 28% of the patronage and 35% of the kilometres operated in the Greater Christchurch Metro Network (as of February 2012).

OPTIONS

As noted above, the current patronage levels and fare recovery of the Greater Christchurch Metro Network means that some changes are a necessity so that financial viability can begin to be restored. As also noted above, the two main ways of achieving this are through retaining the existing network structure and reducing service levels, or through changing the network model to reduce costs whilst retaining coverage.

Staff recommend that the proposed route changes are accepted, together with the changes detailed in this report that have resulted from the consultation. As the Stage 2 changes are a pilot they allow assessment of the comparative value of this new network model, and the decision about whether to roll out the model to the rest of the network can be made accordingly.

CONSISTENCY WITH COUNCIL POLICY

The Regional Public Transport Plan 2012, which is also being considered at this Council meeting, sets out the policies for the operation of public transport services in the Canterbury Region. The development of this plan has occurred at the same time as the network redevelopment project, so the proposed route changes are very well aligned with the policies of the plan.

VIEWS OF AFFECTED PARTIES

The people affected most by the proposed changes are the users of the Metro network (both current and potential), and accordingly a significant level of public consultation about the proposed changes has been carried out. The outcome of this consultation is detailed below.

Staff have also directly engaged with a number of other affected parties, including the existing bus and ferry operators in the region; the New Zealand Transport Agency; affected territorial authorities; and other stakeholder groups (such as disability advocate groups). As well as sharing their views directly with staff, a number of these parties have also made submissions as part of the public consultation process.

Outcome of Public Consultation

The consultation period ran from June 30 to August 3 2012. In total 714 responses were received during the public consultation period, of which 11 responses were duplicates or additional feedback from the same person. 588 of these responses were via the set feedback form included in the consultation document, which included several set questions.

The feedback form included the question "In general, do you support the proposed changes?" 216 (37%) of people answered "yes", 310 people (53%) answered "no", while 61 people did not answer this question or gave an ambiguous answer. The number of people who have indicated that they do not support the proposal is higher than desirable, but it is not a surprising outcome given the scale of the proposed changes. Staff believe that a number of the concerns raised by people who did not support the proposal can be mitigated through changes to some of the proposed routes. The feedback received from each area, and possible changes to routes in response to this feedback is detailed below. However, in many cases the responses made it clear that the only thing they would directly support was a retention of the existing route structure in its entirety, something which is not possible given the current financial constraints.

As part of the consultation process, six drop-in sessions were run at four different locations in Christchurch and Rangiora. These were well attended by members of the public seeking clarification about the proposals and informally giving their feedback.

There was strong support shown for a number of the proposals consulted on. In particular, the new high frequency service between Belfast and Princess Margaret Hospital was well received. There was also support for the extensions of the existing routes 28 and 60 to new destinations in the north and the south of the city respectively.

Waimakariri District

68 submissions and a petition were received that discussed the proposed changes in the Waimakariri District. The largest area of concern related to the discontinuation of the direct public transport link between Woodend and Rangiora.

Since the Northern Star group of services were introduced in 2006, the 92, 912, 913 services have provided a link between Woodend and Rangiora. Together these services offer an average frequency of one service every hour between the two towns. The cost recovery of these services has been consistently poor, and a service review conducted prior to the February 2011 earthquake had proposed their removal (this service review was not completed due to the earthquake). In May 2012, the number of people boarding these services in Woodend averaged less than one person per trip.

A number of the submissions received have noted the strong historical and current links between Woodend and Rangiora, and it is clear that most Woodend residents prefer to travel to Rangiora rather than Kaiapoi to do their shopping and access medical facilities, etc. However, the link to Kaiapoi is also important to residents, as it connects with the main service to Christchurch. The route to Kaiapoi has a stronger potential for future growth, particularly as it will encompass Pegasus Town in the future.

The Waimakariri District Council, along with all of its Community Boards, made a submission to the review suggesting that Environment Canterbury should consider the retention of a service at peak times, as it is suggested that current usage at these times was higher than at other times. However, further analysis of passenger loadings and boardings has not borne

out this suggestion, and instead there does not appear to be any strong pattern in the current usage of the service.

The Woodend Community Association suggested routing the main Kaiapoi and Rangiora service (route 1) via Woodend at off-peak times. However, this would mean that the route within Rangiora differs depending on the time of day, creating legibility issues. It would also compromise the strong existing catchment in the southern part of Rangiora.

Given the usage of these services over the past six years, it is suggested that operating a large bus on a regular schedule between these towns is not the solution. Environment Canterbury has initiated discussions with the North Canterbury Minibus Trust about whether they might be able to offer a service between the two towns, on a pre-booked basis. Initial discussions have indicated that this is likely to be possible subject to the approval of the Trust Board. In addition to any new service that may be possible, passengers will also continue to be able to use Metro services between the two towns by changing buses in Kaiapoi.

Another issue raised in some submissions was that the 92/912/913 services also currently loop around the Rangiora area after they travel in from Woodend, and the withdrawal of these services will reduce options for traveling from the outskirts of Rangiora to the town centre. Again it is suggested that the North Canterbury Minibus Trust may be able to provide a more suitable service in the future to current passengers affected by this change.

Some submitters also expressed concern that the proposed routes did not cover some of the new subdivisions being built on the outskirts of both Rangiora and Kaiapoi. The provision of services to new subdivision areas will be an ongoing issue in the coming years, and a service review that considers these issues specifically will be conducted at an appropriate time in the future.

Summary:

It is proposed that all changes put forward for consultation in the Waimakariri District are implemented without any further alteration.

Northwest of Christchurch

The key issue raised in this area was the proposed replacement of the two direct services from the Sheffield Crescent/Sir William Pickering Dr business area to the central city. Currently there are services via Wairakei Rd/Rossall St and via Burnside/Riccarton to this area.

The Wairakei Rd/Rossall St service was proposed to be replaced with two new services, one from Sheffield Crescent to Northlands Mall, and the other from the central city to Northlands via Rossall St. The majority of responses received opposed these services, although a small number of submissions did note support for the additional links to Northlands Mall.

Given this feedback, it is now proposed to retain the direct service from the Sheffield Crescent/Sir William Pickering Dr business area to the central city via Wairakei Rd. In addition to the feedback received, a review of the proposed services conducted for Environment Canterbury by the Traffic Design Group has highlighted the importance of this business area as it now has the largest number of employees of any single area in the city. The number of people working in this area who are currently using Metro services is low, so it is proposed that the route will travel the whole way along Sir William Pickering Dr, and we will work with businesses in the area to develop workplace travel plans that present public transport as a strong option for staff.

There was also strong feedback on the proposal to replace the service from this area via Burnside and Riccarton to the central city with a new route that travels from Sheffield Crescent to Barrington via Riccarton, Addington and Somerfield. However users of this service are still easily able to connect to wide range of Metro services to the central city at Westfield Riccarton.

Another area of concern raised in some submissions was in regard to the Metro services provided in the Bishopdale area, and in particular that no services would continue to travel directly to the city centre. Staff have looked into possible options, but given the current levels of Metro usage in this area we do not believe that any changes to the original proposal are justified.

Summary

It is proposed that:

- Route 17 should run from the Sir William Pickering Dr/Sheffield Crescent area to the central city via Wairakei Rd and Rossall St;
- Route 131 is renumbered as route 119, but otherwise remains the same as proposed in the consultation;
- Route 120 remains the same as proposed in the consultation.

North of Christchurch

Residents of the Northwood area raised concerns about the withdrawal of the current service that runs directly along Northwood Boulevard, the need to walk out to the Northwood Supa Centa to catch the new high frequency service, and about the proposed use of two roads which buses do not currently travel along. To alleviate some of these concerns, it is proposed to extend the service which was to terminate in Styx Mill Rd to Northwood. This will give Northwood residents more options and mean that all roads that currently have a Metro service retain a service.

As a result of feedback from the Casebrook area, slight changes to both of the Metro routes that travel through this area are proposed so that they balance directness and coverage better. It is also proposed to fully integrate the Redwood service with The Comet service.

A considerable level of feedback was received from the St Albans and Shirley areas regarding access to the central city from the proposed route 132. As a result of the feedback it is now proposed that the revised St Albans route (118) to terminate at Edgeware Village, where a good connection with route 28 to the city centre will be provided. In Shirley, it is proposed that route 45 will now travel via the affected streets so that they retain a service which travels to the city centre (this altered route will be called route 44 to minimise any confusion about the change).

Summary

It is proposed that:

- Route 108 is now proposed to run to Northwood, and the two routes in the Northwood area will only use roads currently used by Metro services;
- Routes 107 (included as part of route 17 in the consultation material) and 108 will be altered slightly to achieve a better balance of directness and coverage;
- What is called route 122 in the consultation material will be fully integrated into the Comet service;
- Route 118 (part of route 132 in the consultation material) will run between Northlands Mall and Edgeware Village only, instead of continuing to Shirley and The Palms; and

Route 45 will be replaced with the new route 44 which will travel via parts of Shirley that were included in route 132 in the consultation.

Northeast of Christchurch

A number of submissions, including one from the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board, commented about the unsuitability of the use of Joy St and Golf Links Rd for Metro services due to traffic calming measures which have recently been installed. It is now proposed that route 146 (called route 133 in the consultation period) should travel via Marshland Rd instead.

The length of route 146 is such that the vehicle resource will not be as efficiently used as it could be. Provision has therefore been made for this route to be extended on to Dallington in the future. However, this service may not be able to begin operating at the same time as the other proposed changes, as it will require some roads to be repaired and a suitable turning point to be available.

Summary

It is proposed that Route 133 is renumbered as route 146, and will initially travel between Marshland and The Palms. Provision has been made for this service to continue on to Dallington in the future when road conditions allow.

South of Christchurch

Several submissions commented about the need for route 17 to continue running along Moorhouse Ave past CPIT rather than via Wordsworth St as suggested, so it is now proposed for the route to remain on Moorhouse Ave.

There was a significant amount of feedback on other proposed changes in the south of the city. Most of this related to the need to change buses on a journey that can currently be completed on one route, such as the Cashmere Hills service from which passengers will transfer to the new high frequency route 1 at Princess Margaret Hospital. Staff have investigated whether any changes to routes might be possible to take into these suggestions into account, but believe that no other solutions (including those suggested by some submitters) offer a better outcome than what was originally proposed in the consultation. The design of routes in this area is somewhat dictated by physical features such as the Port Hills and Heathcote River, as well as man-made constraints such as traffic calming measures on many streets and intersection designs.

One particular area of note has been the proposed route 120 in the Spreydon area. Concern was raised by a relatively small number of residents about the need for passengers traveling to the city centre to change buses at the Selwyn St shops. As well as submissions to the network review, these concerns were raised through a deputation to the Spreydon/Heathcote Community Board (the Board consequently made a submission to the consultation supporting these concerns, and asking for a two year moratorium on any Metro route changes). The option of this route continuing to the city centre was considered, but it has not been put forward as a proposal as the current usage of services in this area does not support more than one route continuing to run into the city centre. Instead it is proposed to make the connection between services at the Selwyn St shops as fast and efficient as possible so that passengers from the Spreydon area continue to have regular and reliable access to the city centre on the Metro network.

Summary:

Route 17 is now proposed to travel via Moorhouse Ave instead of Wordsworth St;
and
All other services in the south of the city remain the same as what was included in
the consultation.

The proposed final route structure for the stage 2 network changes are shown in figures 1
and 2.

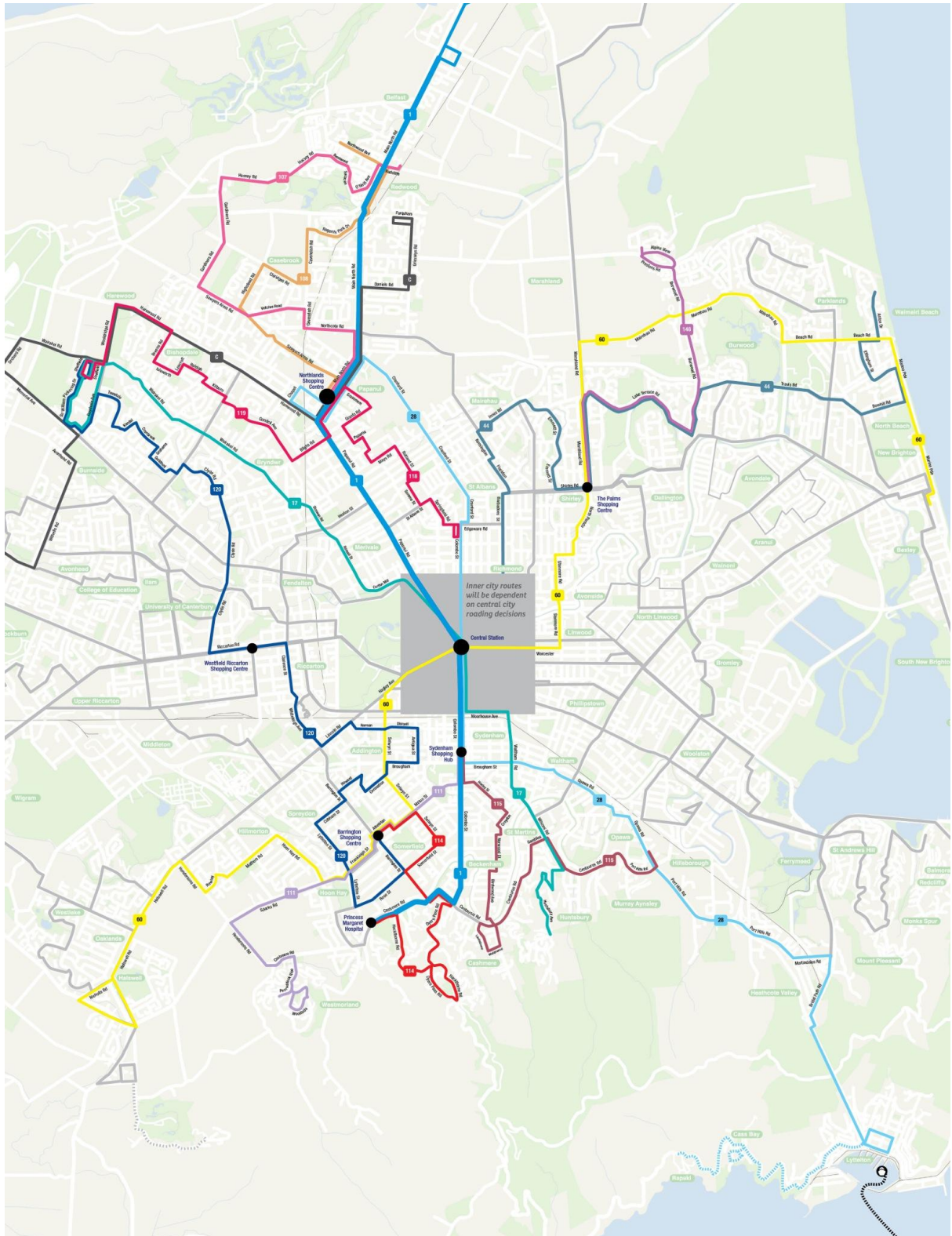


Figure 1: Final proposed routes in Christchurch, including the changes made as a result of the public consultation. The grey lines indicate routes that are not proposed to change at this point in time.

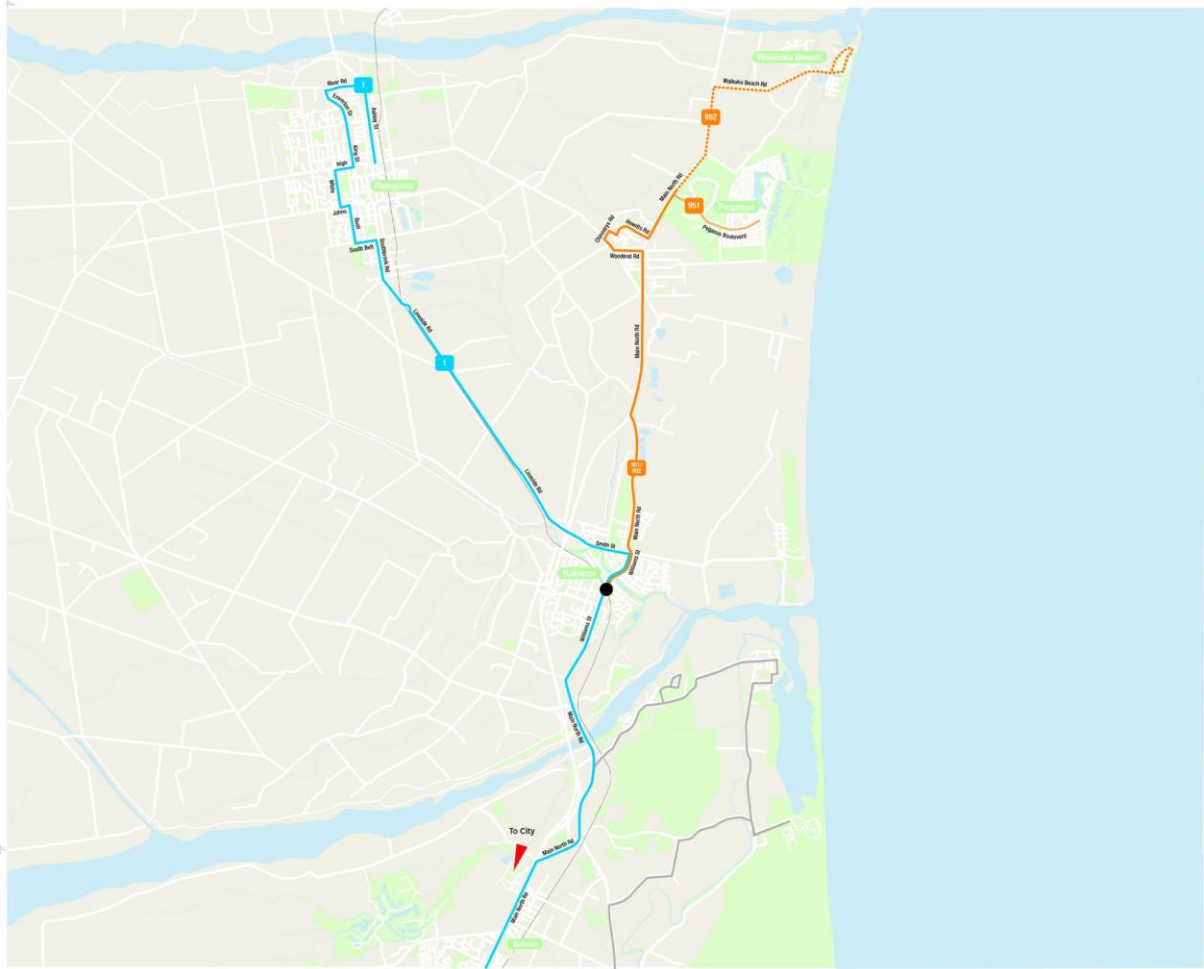


Figure 2: Final proposed routes in the Waimakariri District.

The final proposed changes result in savings of 1,016,367 'in-service' kilometres per annum, and 12 less vehicles will be required than the routes they replace.

It is proposed that all vehicles operating on the new Metro routes are fitted with bike racks, as these are fitted on most of the existing routes they replace.

Subject to the outcome of negotiations with the existing operators, it is proposed that the final changes are implemented in December 2012.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total budget for Greater Christchurch Passenger Services contracts for 2012/13 is \$49,463,302. It is expected that the total saving for the full implementation of the Network Redevelopment Project (Stages 2 and 3) will be approximately 13% dependent on the outcome of negotiation with the operators and changes as a result of Stage 3 consultation.

The total saving for the implementation of Stage 2 of the Network Redevelopment Project is expected to be approximately \$1.8 million dependent on the final outcome of negotiation with the operators currently being undertaken. This amount is purely as a result of the changes proposed in this report and makes no allowance for cost indexation increase as a result of increases in Road User Charges and increased diesel cost.

VALUE PROPOSITION

Patronage for the 2010/11 financial year (July-June) was a little over 13 million trips – a 25% loss in patronage relative to the year before. The cost recovery for the year was 37.2%. Patronage for the 2011/12 was 11.2 million trips – a further 15% loss on the previous year. Whilst these figures indicate a slowing of the decline, a more fundamental change is required to halt and then reverse the trend in patronage and farebox revenue.

The proposed model, with the required supporting infrastructure, will essentially deliver the same level of coverage and the same access time to key destinations, but it will be achieved with greater reliability, using fewer buses, doing fewer kilometres. It is estimated this will equate, upon full transition to the new model, to a saving of \$6m per annum (13%) in operational expenditure, representing a saving to Environment Canterbury and government of around \$3m per annum each.

The proposed Hub & Spoke model provides bus priorities and improved network legibility, both of which are positive benefits. On the other hand the need to change buses at the proposed suburban interchanges will be a disadvantage. Experience in many countries indicates that passengers avoid having to change buses where they can. On the other hand in this case the need to change will be mitigated by a number of factors, including:

Where possible there will be time pulse connections at the hubs, i.e. feeder services arrive at hubs at the same time as the core service arrives with services leaving at the same time.

Suburban interchanges will have a good level of comfort with shelter, seating, real time information, CCTV and in some cases toilets.

Some passengers will be attracted to using local community based services to access parts of the city which they are currently unable to access.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The proposed changes present some risks:

The potential loss in patronage due to many passengers needing to change buses. A higher loss of users is more likely if suitable infrastructure is not able to be provided at the interchange locations in a timely manner.

The reliability of connections in the new model is very important, and there is some risk that these connections may not always be reliable.

There is also some risk that cost savings made by these (or any other) changes may not be fully realised because of other operating costs increasing, most noticeably with the recent increase in Road User Charges and continuing fuel price rises.

The proposed network design has been reviewed for Environment Canterbury by the Traffic Design Group. This report particularly focused on the provision of services to areas where businesses have relocated to since the earthquakes. As previously noted, this report highlighted the importance of the Sheffield Crescent/Sir William Pickering Drive business area, and consequently some changes to the proposed routes in this area have been made.

To minimise the risks associated with passengers needing to change buses, a significant public information campaign is being planned to highlight how these connections will be designed to be as easy for passengers as possible. Staff will work closely with Metro companies to educate their staff so that they are aware of how the connections between services will work, and in turn are able to offer advice and guidance to their passengers.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

The proposed changes to routes will require the renegotiation of existing public transport operating units with incumbent operators. There is flexibility within the current Regional, Partnership and Unit agreements to allow such changes to be made, particularly given the financial implications of continuing with the current model.

CONCLUSION

There is a strong need to make changes to the Greater Christchurch Metro Network to reduce the current operating costs and increase the viability of the system. It is deemed that the most appropriate way to do this is by changing the network model to better serve the market at a reduced overall cost. New routes have been developed to implement the first part of this new network model, and public consultation on these new routes has been carried out. Some revisions to the proposals have been made due to feedback received, and the final routes proposed to be implemented in December 2012.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Council:

(a) *Approves the following new Metro routes for implementation in December 2012:*

1 Rangiora and Belfast – Princess Margaret Hospital

1X Rangiora – City Express

17 Sheffield Crescent – Huntsbury

28 Lyttelton and Rapaki – Northlands

60 Parklands – Hillmorton

95 Waikuku Beach/Pegasus – City

107 Styx Mill - Northlands

108 Casebrook – Northlands

111 Westmorland – Sydenham

114 Cashmere – Barrington

115 Murray Aynsley – Sydenham

118 St Albans – Northlands

119 Bishopdale – Northlands

120 Burnside – Spreydon

146 Marshland – The Palms (and future extension to Dallington)

951 Pegasus – Kaiapoi

952 Waikuku Beach – Kaiapoi

(b) *Approves the extension of the existing 'The Comet' service from Northlands to Redwood from December 2012.*