

22 June 2023

File Ref: OIAPR-1274023063-3063

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Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for information 2023-143

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

1. *“Why does Metlink very frequently replace trains with buses on busy holiday weekends?”*
2. *How does this fit in with Kapiti's desire to attract tourists to our area, for example to walk the Escarpment track? Do they liaise with local government and vice versa?*
3. *Why does Metlink select a company like NCS, whose buses not only look like they past their used-by date, but also have drivers who seemingly pay so little regard to safety -- in other words does Metlink have particular standards they expect bus companies to meet?*
4. *Do bus companies tender for the replacement service?”*

Greater Wellington's response follows:

Background

KiwiRail is a state-owned enterprise that owns and manages the rail network within New Zealand. Greater Wellington has an access agreement with KiwiRail to run passenger trains on the Wellington Regional Metropolitan Network as part of the Metlink public transport network. Greater Wellington has a partnering agreement with the rail operator Transdev to deliver Metlink rail services.

To ensure the safety and reliability of our rail network, KiwiRail conducts regular planned network maintenance on the tracks. Work on the line which requires buses to replace train services are planned for in advance with Metlink and Transdev, with the aim of keeping disruption to commuters to a minimum. When major engineering work is required, such as replacing tracks or upgrading signalling systems, a line or section of line may need to be closed for longer than 48 hours to complete the upgrade work efficiently and safely. For these larger scale works on the network, KiwiRail may need to take advantage of the public holiday weekends.

Specific to the Kāpiti Line, over the past months, KiwiRail has been undertaking essential slope stabilisation and monitoring works that have required lower-patronage train services (in evenings and on weekends) to be regularly replaced by buses.

1. Why does Metlink very frequently replace trains with buses on busy holiday weekends?

We understand that buses replacing trains can have disruptive impacts on our commuters on weekends. Unfortunately, buses replacing trains for planned network maintenance are targeted towards lower-patronage services, including evening and weekend services, to minimise disruption for the thousands of weekday commuters. Long weekends allow more time for major work to be completed, as noted above.

2. How does this fit in with Kapiti's desire to attract tourists to our area, for example to walk the Escarpment track? Do they liaise with local government and vice versa?

We agree that buses replacing trains, and their timing, can complicate weekend plans for tourists who would prefer to make their plans around the regular weekend train services running to Kāpiti Coast. However, Greater Wellington liaises with KiwiRail to minimise disruption wherever possible, and we would note that regular network maintenance is an operational necessity that improves the performance and safety of the network overall.

With respect to supporting tourism in Wellington, Metlink signed a Memorandum of Understanding in August 2022 with WellingtonNZ to support any significant events that are planned to occur in the Wellington region. For example, we have provided free transport tickets to events such as Hurricanes games, Homegrown and will be doing the same for FIFA Women's World Cup. We continue to look at opportunities to support tourism and events in the Wellington region.

3. Why does Metlink select a company like NCS, whose buses not only look like they past their used-by date, but also have drivers who seemingly pay so little regard to safety -- in other words does Metlink have particular standards they expect bus companies to meet?

Greater Wellington does not contract the bus company replacing train services—this is done by our rail operator, Transdev. However, per Transdev's partnering agreement with Greater Wellington, Transdev is required to work with our four Metlink bus operators (Tranzurban, NZ Bus, Mana, and Uzabus) as the choice for arranging a bus replacement.

In our normal operating environment, nearly all bus-replaced services would be fulfilled by one of our bus operators: this ensures the consistency of commuter experience in having a Metlink-standard bus delivering that replacement. However, in the current operating environment where resources are significantly overstretched by the ongoing bus driver shortfall (approximately 120 drivers), our bus operators do not have enough drivers to provision all bus-replaced services—their priority is delivering the regularly scheduled Metlink services to ensure that a degradation of service

on the bus network does not occur. As our four bus operators continue to employ drivers, we expect to see more Metlink branded vehicles running rail replacement services in the coming months.

In the instance of not being able to fulfil a bus replacement with our bus operators due to unavailability, Transdev has had to sub-contract other companies to deliver a bus-replaced service. While buses provided by other bus companies would ideally have the same facilities and quality standards as a Metlink bus in the first instance, the priority is to keep our commuters moving (rather than cancel a train service)—in this instance, any available bus or coach would be sourced. We continue to support our bus operators with their workforce planning so that our bus operators' ability to consistently fulfil bus replacement services is restored as quickly as possible.

To answer your question regarding standards for our bus operators, these are set out in our partnering agreements as well as by the Requirement for Urban Buses (RUB) which is a Waka Kotahi guidance document to procure buses that meet certain standards. Our four bus operators are required to comply with the standards set out in the RUB under our partnering agreements.

4. Do bus companies tender for the replacement service?

This information is not held by Greater Wellington and as such is refused under section 17(g) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act), on the basis 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:

This information is likely held by Transdev. We would encourage you to make contact with them for this information.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Fiona Abbott'.

Fiona Abbott

Kaiwhakahaere Matua Waka-ā-atea | Acting Group Manager Metlink

PROACTIVE RELEASE