



Thursday 13 April 2017

Barbara Donaldson
Chair, Sustainable Transport Committee
Greater Wellington Regional Council
Shed 39, 2 Fryatt Quay
Pipitea, Wellington 6011

RE: KiwiRail Holiday Rail Closures

Dear Barbara

Thank you for your letter dated 13 March 2017, in which you raise concerns about rail closures during the holiday period.

KiwiRail regrets any difficulties caused to the community during rail closures, however it considers that scheduling maintenance work over the holiday period is safer for KiwiRail workers, more cost effective for Greater Wellington, and enables work to be completed in a few days, rather than over weeks or months. Practical and efficient delivery of these works is necessary to ensure that the Wellington rail network can be maintained to a high standard.

In your letter you correctly note that major highways are maintained without closing the road for extended periods of time. However, there are notable differences between rail and road maintenance in regard to access. Whereas road traffic can be easily contra-flowed or diverted, Wellington track and signalling rail systems are not designed to facilitate contra flow operation. In addition, Wellington does not have an alternative rail routes, which means trains travelling to any of the Metlink destinations only have one route to follow.

The timing of maintenance work on the rail route to Wellington is also constrained by several other factors, including but not limited to the following:

1. KiwiRail regularly needs to complete 'heavy works' which cannot be carried out at night because they generate high noise levels.
2. KiwiRail must keep overhead lines, above or adjacent to the work site, live at 1500 volts to enable electric trains to operate. This restricts the type of repair work that can be undertaken while electric commuter trains are running.
3. KiwiRail's freight contracts are dependent on delivery and connections running on most days of the year, outside of holidays. Freight services run frequently throughout the night, limiting access to the rail tracks during the evening and early morning hours. Opportunities without any freight movements are very rare, a day or two mostly and mostly over Christmas – New Year.
4. Making a site safe for work involves a strict and sequential series of steps to switch off overhead power at remote switching locations, provide physical earths and hand over certificate to the work group. The same steps have to be carried out in reverse sequence when re-energising. With passenger services operating to around midnight

and power required in yards and for empty stock working, a "night shift" can involve less than three hours of track access.

5. Rigid and time consuming processes also have to be followed to establish protection from train movements, gain access to the track and clear and hand back the track for every train movement. The need to accommodate freight trains most nights reduces the useful time on track, even if late evening passenger services are bus replaced.
6. Maintenance work undertaken during weekday hours would have consequences for commuters making their way to and from work and for the important interpeak market.
7. There are a number of maintenance tasks that take much longer than a night or even a single weekend day or weekend to complete. Major bridge or level crossing works can occupy an entire Christmas Block of Line (shut down) even, in the case of bridges, working around the clock with two crews.

Maintenance work implemented over a single period of time is more efficient as it is uninterrupted. It ensures work is undertaken to the required standard and within a fixed budget, avoiding the need to reduce, restrict or stop future services. Efficient works and a well maintained network ensures Metlink can offer a quality service without increased costs. Night work only provides a small part of the answer.

Since signing the Wellington Network Agreement in 2011, KiwiRail has set up significantly improved processes with the Metro Service Operator and GWRC to reduce the impact and cost of train replacement by buses through better future planning. This has included avoiding closing both the Kapiti and Hutt Routes simultaneously at Christmas, alternating the closure each Christmas. This also ensures that all available resources are concentrated on the line being closed, delivering maximum gain for the disruption. KiwiRail will continue to work with Metlink and GWRC to make further improvements.

Please don't hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions, or if you would like further clarification on any of the points raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely



Michael McKeon
Wellington Metro Network Services Manager