

8 February 2023

File Ref: OIAP-7-26930

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Request for information 2023-002

I refer to your request for information dated 6 January 2023, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 6 January 2023. You have requested the following:

“As a rate payer I would like to know what the regional council are doing to resolve the totally unacceptable bus services we are currently experiencing. [REDACTED] relies on the bus services from Whitby to Porirua to get to work. Recently the Whitby bus services are regularly being cancelled during the commute periods leaving her to catch a taxi to work which costs [REDACTED] a pop. As you can imagine this is financially unacceptable.

A comprehensive breakdown of what the council is doing in this regard would be appreciated to put the public's mind at ease.”

Greater Wellington's response follows:

From 4 – 27 January 2023, Metlink delivered a 'Saturday plus' timetable on weekdays that affected the majority of bus services in Wellington city and Porirua. The decision to run a 'Saturday plus' timetable for January was made in response to the ongoing driver shortage, and to reduce its impact on both drivers and customers. Running the 'Saturday plus' timetable allowed bus drivers to take leave and allowed more surety for customers by reducing unplanned cancellations on the network.

However, we understand that the revised timetable and capacity issues affecting certain services had negative impacts on some commuters during the month of January. We are sorry for the disruption caused to [REDACTED] regular commute, and for the financial stress caused by needing to seek an alternative form of transport. The usual weekday timetable has now resumed starting on Monday, 30 January 2023 (noting however that the temporary suspensions affecting 67 NZ Bus services and 114 Tranzurban services are ongoing, as detailed on the Metlink website).

You have asked what Greater Wellington Regional Council is doing to address the current service level. We agree that the current state does not reflect the service level we would ideally be providing and are actively working alongside our bus operators to improve the situation. However, there are a number of ongoing challenges that we face, of which the most pressing is the workforce shortage (which is industry-wide and does not just affect Metlink and Wellington bus operators). In particular, the driver shortage makes it difficult to operate the public transport network to a level that we would consider to be efficient and effective.

Metlink has undertaken a number of steps to address driver workforce issues—acknowledging that these issues are multi-faceted and will likely require time and further work to get to a desired level. Working alongside our bus operators, we have taken the following actions:

- Greater Wellington has stepped in where necessary to aid recruitment and retention, which includes ushering in rest and meal breaks, embarking on a programme of driver rest facility upgrades, bringing in a Living Wage, topping up wages to \$27 per hour, and reorganising timetables to remove many split-shifts.
- Greater Wellington has been working with Central Government to usher in fair pay agreements, a set of standards that nationally recognise the workforce—with pay rates that can be targeted to city, suburban and rural duties.
- More recently, we have worked with Central Government on immigration to get a regular recruitment pipeline back in place, without eroding existing pay and conditions here in New Zealand. We are making great progress in engaging with operators, drivers, and unions. We will continue to advocate to central government for assistance to address the driver shortage and continue to review our network to make improvements.
- Kinetic, the new owners of NZ Bus (one of the four Wellington bus operators), have an overseas recruitment campaign underway and 100 suitable candidates have accepted offers of employment.
- NZ Bus is also increasing domestic recruitment activities in the region and will be undertaking a series of recruitment advertising campaigns and direct targeting initiatives over the next two months to supplement the overall recruitment focus.

To present these actions in the context of our wider operating environment, we work with our bus operators on a daily basis. Our Operations and Partnership teams receive twice (or thrice) daily situation reports, and provide support regularly in addition to scheduled fortnightly and monthly meetings. The frequency of contact depends on what support is required to deliver the network efficiently and safely.

Greater Wellington also monitors the performance of our operators through Key and Normal Performance Indicators and a variety of systems, provide data to back up our regular interactions. We have teams that work closely with many people within each Operator organisation—including for fleet, operations, health & safety, contractual, financial, customer service customer communications and many more areas. This reflects the operational environment we work in, and the close working relationships that will continue to enable us to deliver improvements across the network. Being able to deliver an effective reliable service to our customers is at the heart of the work we do. We will continue to work with our bus operators and other stakeholders to reinvigorate the driver workforce and improve current levels of service.

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



Samantha Gain
Kaiwhakahaere Matua Waka-ā-atea | General Manager Metlink