

Proposed variations to the Otago Southland Regional Land Transport Plans 2015-2021

At the outset I would like to acknowledge that producing the review document would not have been a simple or easy task. The strength of the review document is, in my view, the recognition by the Otago and Southland councils that social and environmental aspects of transport issues need to be considered, rather than limiting the analysis to within narrower parameters. So, thank you for the forethought behind such an approach, and for the opportunity to make a submission on the review document.

My concerns relate primarily to the current bus service in Dunedin, which is the service that presumably forms the basis of the proposed central city bus hub development that 'is about to be constructed' (Summary section of the review). Towards the end of last year I emailed some of my concerns to the Otago Peninsula Community Board - concerns arising mostly from locals' experience of the new bus route between the Otago Peninsula and Dunedin city. The email is copied below as it sets out the main issues I wish to raise in this submission: the lack of reliability of the bus service, the problems with the change in route whereby the bus no longer goes to the University, and the lack of any obvious accountability in relation to the contract process.

Hi Paul [Pope] and Graham [McArthur],

I'm writing about the Portobello bus service - the no. 18 route. I'd appreciate your views/feedback, and whether you could follow-up on the issues outlined below on behalf of those of us in the community who are finding the recent timetable/route change problematic.

1. Irregularity of the service

Whilst it is helpful to have more 'times' in the bus timetable, this improvement is more than off-set by the irregularity of the bus service. By 'irregularity' I'm referring to the ongoing problem of the buses being late, early, or a complete no-show (all of those continuing to happen within the last fortnight). In terms of the buses now being 'early', apparently the 'Broad Bay' time per the timetable refers to other than the Bacon Street stop, even though in the past that time seemed to fit in with the Bacon Street stop. We were not notified of a change in interpretation in that regard, and it has caught many people out by being 3-4 minutes early. It has also been 3-4 minutes early at the MacAndrew Bay stop which, timing-wise, doesn't really make sense given the MacAndrew Bay stop situation (as compared to the Broad Bay stops). It has caused MacAndrew Bay people to miss very important meetings/appointments in town.

Similarly, a no-show from town over the past week meant that people had to remain in town for an extra hour until the next bus.

2. Route change

The bus no longer stops close to the University (the Museum Reserve), and instead returns towards the peninsula via George Street. The University and Polytech are significant employers in Dunedin, hence it would seemingly make sense to enable its employees/students to reach it relatively easily via public transport. By going along George

Street the bus gets delayed significantly in peak traffic. It is certainly possible to walk from the New World stop to University (?10 minutes), but not so easy in the rain or if laden with books etc. Additionally, the museum reserve is just at the beginning of the Uni/Poly area. From New World, it is a considerable walk to other parts of Uni/Poly. Whilst I appreciate the supposed plan that those heading for Uni/Poly would transfer onto another bus once in town, there are some glitches with that reasoning:

- A transfer system requires the arrival/departure of buses to be very reliable, and it is somewhat difficult to have confidence in that at the moment.
- Reasonably, one would at least (at best) have to allow for a 10 minute wait for the transfer, which would mean we would have to leave home a whole bus-time earlier than if the bus went directly to the Museum Reserve e.g. we would need to catch the 7.27am from Portobello, instead of the 7.57am, for say a 9am start at Uni (the closest parts of Uni that is). That makes car travel so much more practicable, even for those of us who would prefer to support a public bus service.

3. The contract process

Firms who put forward the lowest costs when tendering for contracts are typically the firms who are granted contracts. For the contracting process to achieve the intended efficient and effective provision of services/products, penalties must be included in the contract - so as to deter firms from under-costing their service/product. For instance, a bus service that under-budgets for drivers, including stand-by drivers, would otherwise be unfairly advantaged when tendering for a contract. Correspondingly, the penalties would need to be rigorously imposed, and those affected by the contract would need to be aware of any penalties that have (or have not) been imposed. Those affected by the no. 18 bus service contract include the local community. So, what we need to know is what penalties were included in the contract, and what penalties have been imposed?

Kind regards
Jane Ashman

As an update, since that email was sent there have been numerous occasions where I would have preferred to take a bus to the University, but given the lack of reliability and change of route, I have taken the car instead. On the one occasion I did take the bus last week, the bus left the New World stop (which is the starting point from the city) 12 minutes late.

My additional concerns, not specifically mentioned in the above email are as follows:

4. The timing of the submission cut-off date

January submission dates limit the number/scope of potential submissions from institutions and the public. Many individuals are on holiday during the period, institutions either close for some of the period or have reduced staff attendance, and local committees typically do not meet in January. For example in terms of the issues raised in the above email, the local Broad Bay Community Centre does not meet in January and so realistically has no chance to gather viewpoints from the approximately 300 households it is supposed to represent. Similarly, the Otago Peninsula Community Board does not meet in January.

5. The bus fares

The bus fares are still too high (the Peninsula to Dunedin city fares serve as an example). The formulae used for setting the fares is not obvious. Presumably, it has been calculated so as to be financially preferable for a single-user of a car, taking into account petrol and other running costs. Whilst at one level such a formula may appear valid, I suggest it is an inappropriate basis for fares (given the aims of the councils per the review document). From my discussions with members of the public, it seems that the petrol price alone influences the bus vs car financial decision. Such a basis is somewhat understandable given that some of the vehicle costs are fixed costs, i.e. will be incurred by the car owner irrespective of whether the car is used or not (e.g. warrant of fitness and registration); that repair bills from wear and tear are not easily associated with any specific trip i.e. the time lags that exist between specific trips and the repair bills make it easy to distance the two psychologically; and the added convenience of a car can easily, psychologically, offset the unknown (at that time) wear and tear costs.

6. The size of bus on the Peninsula bus route

According to the review document 'An upgrade of Otago Peninsula roading is about to begin' (Summary section). What is not clear from the review document is whether the size of buses makes a difference in terms of the wear and tear of a road, and if so whether that difference is taken into account in the overall costings. At present large (mainly empty) buses are used on the narrow, winding Peninsula road, whereas smaller buses would seem to be more fitting for the local conditions; the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists; and potentially be financially beneficial. Locals regularly comment on their latest unnerving experience of the large buses on the narrow road.

7. Vulnerabilities

Vulnerabilities of the roading system in terms of earthquakes and landslides etc are considered in the document (p. 41). What is not clear is whether vulnerability of the Dunedin central bus hub has been considered. That is, whilst hubs have advantages, one recognised disadvantage is their vulnerability - threats to hubs potentially jam up entire public transport systems (non-hub designs being not so vulnerable in that respect).

8. Estimates

There is no obvious review of under/over runs of the estimates included in the review document. Correspondingly, there is no indication of where the public would be able to access details (including reasons for) under/over runs of estimates. This point corresponds to the issue raised in the email above relating to the Dunedin bus service. Estimates relating to other services, or construction projects, equally require measures of review/accountability/penalty for the contracting system to operate effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

9. Fit for purpose

The comments in the review document regarding a desire to '[e]nhance system performance' (p. 51), and that the 'Dunedin transport network is generally fit for purpose' need to be revisited - as outlined above the Peninsula bus service has not been

enhanced and is currently not fit for purpose. As such it is little used, and even less so now by those heading to the University/Polytechnic area.

Within the review document, several statements outlining the councils' priorities and desired outcomes indicate the concerns raised above would deserve, and would receive, attention:

The importance of the University and Polytechnic to Dunedin:

p. 27 'Education and health care are the focus of its economy, with just over a quarter (26.4 per cent) of all employment being in one of those two industries . This reflects the importance of Dunedin's education assets; the University of Otago alone has been estimated to contribute to around 15 per cent of the city's GDP3 .'

p. 27 'Manufacturing employment has been declining in Dunedin, although this is being offset with gains in the high-tech and ICT sectors. Major employers are the University of Otago, Otago Polytechnic and the region's base hospital in Dunedin ...'

p. 39 '... economic and employment growth is expected to be focused in the city centre and around the tertiary campus in North Dunedin ...'

The importance of customer voice:

p. 43 & 51 The emphasis on an 'increased customer voice' ...

p. 136, Appendix 3. 'Putting customers' voices and needs to the fore

... Increasingly, the voice of customers is becoming more important

...The notion of what constitutes value for money needs to take diverse customer needs into account.'

The current low uptake of public transport

p. 31 'Private vehicle use dominates transport in Dunedin as well, with public transport comprising only a small proportion of total trips.'

Kind regards

Jane Ashman