Informal Workshop Notes

Commencing: Wednesday 13 October 2021, at 9.30 am

Venue: via Zoom (Audio Visual meeting)

Chairperson: Cr Andrew von Dadelszen

Deputy Chairperson: Cr Lyall Thurston

Members: Bay of Plenty Regional Council:

Chairman Doug Leeder
Cr Stacey Rose
Cr Paula Thompson
Cr Jane Nees
Cr Norm Bruning

Rotorua Lakes Council/ Lakes Community Board
Phill Thomas

Whakatāne District Council
Mayor Judy Turner
Deputy Mayor Andrew Iles

Western Bay of Plenty District Council
Mayor Garry Webber

Tauranga City Council
Commissioner Stephen Selwood

Waka Kotahi - NZTA
Vaughan Roberts

In Attendance: Bay of Plenty Regional Council: Cr Matemoana McDonald, Mat Taylor – General Manager, Corporate, Namouta Poutasi – General Manager, Strategy and Science, James Llewellyn – Transport and Urban Planning Manager, Bron Healey – Principal Advisor, Regional Development, Amanda Namana – Committee Advisor

Apologies: None received

Please note: This Workshop was recorded and can be accessed on Council's YouTube channel: Public Transport Committee Workshop Zoom Recording - 13 October 2021

1.   Introduction

Chair von Dadelszen opened the workshop and Principal Advisor, Regional Development Bron Healey outlined the two parts to the workshop:

- Part A: RPTP Strategic Framework
    i.   Public transport challenges and opportunities;
    ii. Vision statement;
    iii. Objectives; and
    iv. Focus areas.
- Part B: Fares and financial sustainability.

2.   Discussion

2.1 Developing the Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) Strategic Framework

Presentation: Regional Public Transport Plan Review: Objective ID A3957153

Presented By: Bron Healey - Principal Advisor, Regional Development

CHALLENGES

Key Points – Members:

- Identifying the flaws in the existing RPTP, what had changed since it was released and why targets were not being met
- Prioritise addressing the issue of failure to achieve mode shift over the past 15 years
- Identifying the reason why public transport use was declining instead of increasing, despite efforts made
- Meeting transport needs of isolated and rural communities
- High car dependency illustrated the failure to achieve mode shift and community buy-in to multi-modal transport infrastructure
- Supported the emphasis on climate change and emissions reduction
- Needed to identify the targets for public transport use and to supply strong incentives
- Accessibility, affordability and convenience of public transport
- Each community had different needs and challenges, requiring different solutions. Needed to look at this regionally and sub-regionally with the main focus being how to get people using public transport
- Intervention may not be popular, but some form was required
- Fundamental to getting the strategy right was a targeted approach informed with available data, trends, how services could be changed/ adapted
- Focus on areas which would achieve the biggest gains
- Making carparking in the city less affordable would drive change.

OPPORTUNITIES

Key Points – Members:

- Better integration of public transport planning and service delivery, park and ride services, bus priority lanes and hubs were all underway to create success in mode shift
- The move to zero emissions public transport was both a challenge and an opportunity - people were becoming more aware of climate change challenges and starting to look for ways to mitigate their impact
- Suggested setting targeted rates on more carparks and creating a marketing campaign for employers to include public transport in remuneration packages

- Community concern around climate change provided an additional push to move to electric buses and the possibility to rebrand strongly under this, particularly with the younger population / create an environmentally friendly brand rather than competing on costs
- Important to identify and differentiate between the commuter challenges and the social service/good aspect
- Challenged a rethink for smaller communities that did not meet critical mass
- For rural communities, it was suggested that smaller buses/vans provided by community services agencies that were idle during the day could be utilised to provide public transport
- An integrated public transport system was top of the list of critical success factors
- The provision of bus shelters had been included in Tauranga City Council's Long Term Plan and they were interested in receiving a list of priorities for action, to be informed by patronage numbers
- Joining infrastructure investment with service provision; align with UFTI, TSP and data analysis to ensure investment was channelled quickly and appropriately.

In Response to Questions:

- Research suggested that the critical mass in terms of population size for rapid transit was cities closer to the size of Auckland
- Reasons for providing public transport services varied between cities with populations large enough for an urban network (trying to achieve mode shift and address congestion), to smaller communities where people required access to essential community services
- There were opportunities for investment in public transport coming through the pipeline from different sections of central government.

Summary of Guidance Provided (Challenges and Opportunities):

- Emphasizing the importance of increasing the current patronage – ' carrot and stick' approach (congestion charging, parking prices, carbon price)
- Recognising the importance of understanding needs both regionally and sub-regionally
- Increased efficiency in targeted funding and noting funding challenges
- 'Getting people onto buses' and recognising the culture change required
- Better integration of public transport services and infrastructure delivery, linking with urban design
- Bringing the community along in the conversations
- The importance of moving to zero emissions and potentially eco-friendly branding
- Tailoring services to meet sub-regional needs and linking them with other providers
- Looking at opportunities for private investment; possible linkage with the Ministry of Education and their provision of services.

10.26 am – The Workshop **adjourned.**

10.35 am – The Workshop **reconvened.**

VISION

Key Points - Members:

- A vision statement should be short and sharp
- The region had different needs and what worked for Tauranga would not be suitable for Ōpōtiki, Kawerau or Waihi Beach
- Initial suggestions for vision statement:
    o Getting more people on board
    o A well understood public transport service that was affordable and had a strategically predictable timetable, that met the needs of the communities
    o Develop a safe, inclusive, affordable, convenient, low carbon public transport system which, in combination with active mobility genuinely provided a competitive advantage to car use for local journeys
    o To provide the appropriate public transport service to the community it was designed to serve
    o Greater customer experience that was positive and unique to each area and improved patronage.

In Response to Questions:

- Having a vision statement in the RPTP was optional, although it was becoming more standard in recent RPTP's.

OBJECTIVES

Direction Provided by Members:

- Prioritise customer/user as mode shift could not be achieved without first creating a positive customer experience
- Customer experience, network design and accessibility were the most critical objectives
- Provide the appropriate vehicle for the service required
- Increase vehicle capacity utilisation
- Customer service went beyond the delivery of service. It required an integrated approach that covered a range of activities, including external factors that contributed to the customer experience e.g. behaviour at bus interchanges and the environment within which the service operated
- Reducing the effects of climate change was a high priority objective.

FOCUS AREAS

Key Points - Members:

- Accessibility for all user groups: hub and spoke/connectivity model needed to be determined. Considered that hub and spoke model was the right outcome
- Plan public transport services during the growth phase; prioritising infrastructure with housing
- Priority of focus would vary for each area, e.g. in Rotorua the upcoming changes to electric buses needed to be considered for contract renewals
- Achieving behaviour change meant understanding people's attitudes
- Once the vision and values were clearly established, the objectives and focus areas (the when and the how) would follow

- Keep the RPTP simple and focused in order to get action
- A strong communication strategy was key in promoting benefits of the transport system
- It was important to have all partners along on the journey during the planning process
- Suggested a video on Council's website or a letterbox drop to advise people how to use the bus and the Bee Card system as this was a clear barrier to some users.

Items for Staff Follow Up:

- Provide definitions of SMART objectives for next meeting: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound
- Data based on bus occupancy to be provided to Commissioner Selwood.

2.2   Fares and Financial Sustainability

Presentation: Fares and financial sustainability: Objective ID A3957155

Presented By: Transport and Urban Planning Manager James Llewellyn

Key Points - Members:

- The centre of the problem was both farebox recovery and patronage numbers were trending down - the current policy was not being adhered to and was not working
- Queried to what extent patronage had been affected by Covid-19
- Needed to use data to understand what was driving the farebox recovery decline on specific routes / subsidy per trip by time of day, in order to target services to achieve the greatest patronage increase
- Focus on customers that would likely make the transition to public transport – commuters, high density employment areas
- Total focus needed to be getting people on board, before looking at the relationship between price and patronage
- Operating buses at the wrong times/ wrong frequency could be increasing carbon emissions; optimisation of provision of services was critical
- Convenience, perception and cost drove patronage.

Direction Provided by Members:

- Bring the public along on deciding communication and fares strategy
- Keeping children on buses was an investment in the future as it created behaviour change
- Until there was a bus service that people saw as a viable alternative to using the car, farebox recovery should take a back seat – keep focus on converting and incentivising people to use the bus
- Did not support price being based on distance
- Consider incentives for commuters/ frequent users e.g. after eight concessions having the rest of the week free
- Supported continued free fares for students
- Keep the pricing structure simple and easy to understand
- Flat fare structures worked best
- Perception was important and large empty buses were an issue - experimenting with smaller EVs should be considered
- Further understanding of contracts and implications was required.

> ### In Response to Questions:
>
> - Looking at target markets to drive patronage growth, i.e. commuters to work (incentives to use bus instead of car)
> - Anecdotal evidence showed school children who previously walked/cycled would be more inclined to catch the bus as it was free
> - Positive impact of free buses observed by schools was reduced congestion
> - When setting a fare policy, there was a number of factors that needed to be considered and balanced, including the impact on school services
> - The Ministry of Transport was reviewing the Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) – a challenge under the previous system was having to enter into 9-year contracts with private bus operators, which meant replacing the buses most likely would incur additional costs. A preferred option would instead be Council having the flexibility to own the buses.

3.   Next Steps

A further Workshop on the RPTP would be scheduled before the end of 2021

The workshop closed at 12.08 pm.