

STATEMENT ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT FOR PALMERSTON NORTH





About this Strategy

The Palmerston North City Council Public Transport Position Statement was prepared in 2011 to assist the Council with formulating its submission on the Horizons Regional Council draft Regional Public Transport Plan (2012 – 2022). The document was adopted by the Palmerston North City Council in June 2011.

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SUMMARY

The City Council adopted the Sustainable City Strategy in 2010, which reflects the Council's 2009 – 2019 long-term plan goal that:

Palmerston North is a leading city in the quest to become environmentally sustainable.

The development of an effective public transport system is fundamental to the Council achieving this vision. To achieve this aspiration there will need to be a number of changes over time, including:

- 1. Increasing the frequency of city bus services**
- 2. Extending the hours of operation of bus services**
- 3. Improving bus routes**
- 4. Expanding the Capital Connection rail service**
- 5. Council parking policy supporting public transport**
- 6. Identifying new and innovative ways to ensure public transport is affordable for everyone in the city.**
- 7. To ensure joined-up policy and implementation a joint working party between the City Council and Horizons Regional Council is established to investigate possible enhancements to city and regional bus services.**



BACKGROUND

Fifty-eight percent of the city's greenhouse gas emissions come from petrol and diesel consumption.

Improving public transport use and increasing the proportion of journeys by active transport are the two key options for reducing fuel consumption in the city. Palmerston North has an excellent infrastructure for public transport. Approximately 85 percent of the City's urban population has a bus stop within 400 metres (5 minutes walking distance) of their house. Its long term land use planning has public transport as a key transport mode for future citizens.

Public transport patronage in Palmerston North has risen strongly over the last three years. An additional 338,000 journeys were made in the 3 years between March 2008 and March 2011, representing an increase of 44%. While this growth is very positive it must be seen in the context of Census data for mode of transport used for travel to work. In March 2006, 1.5 percent of residents identified bus as the main means of transport to work and only 0.1% used a train. In contrast 67% drove a car to work.

Palmerston North's population is projected to grow to 94,000 by 2031. Employment growth projections for the city are very strong, with projections suggesting employment may rise by 45% between 2006 and 2031. Currently, it is estimated around 8,000 people commute to the





city for work from surrounding local authorities. This is expected to continue to grow in the future.

It is expected that an increasing number of elderly people in Palmerston North will contribute to an increase in the proportion of households without access to a motor vehicle. Improving the level of bus services in the city is important for maintaining access to services in the city.

Census data also shows that a higher proportion of young people in Palmerston North use bus services for travel to work (2.7 percent of people in the 15 – 24 age group used a bus to travel to work in 2006). The city has a younger population than the national average, with a median age in 2006 of 32.1 years compared with 35.8 years for the overall New Zealand population. Extending the hours of operation of bus services will offer more transport options for young people employed in shift work, with mostly evening work in the city (such as cafes and restaurants and call centres) and will also offer better access to recreational opportunities in the city. Bus services to Massey and IPC operate until 9.30pm on week nights but services to other areas of the city finish at 6.30pm (additional city services operate on Friday nights until 8.20pm).

There is evidence from fuel use data for the Manawatu-Horowhenua region that the introduction of the free Massey and UCOL bus scheme in 2004 has contributed to a reduction in petrol consumption in the region but it is difficult to isolate the effect of the free bus scheme from other economic factors. Petrol consumption

in the region declined by 4.1 percent between December 2004 and December 2010 despite a 3.4 percent increase in total population over the same period and a 5.2 percent increase in employment. New Zealand petrol consumption declined by just 0.3 percent over this period but it experienced a 6.8 percent population increase and a 5.4 percent increase in employment.

At the time of the 2006 Census 8.8 percent of Palmerston North households did not have access to a motor vehicle, slightly higher than the 7.8 percent for all New Zealand households. From 2005 to 2011 the annual number of motor new and used motor vehicles registered for the first time in the Palmerston North postal area declined from 7,360 to 3,946.

If the city is able to triple the number of residents who use the bus to travel to work rather than driving to work (from the 2006 base), this should result in an additional 1000 residents travelling by bus to work but would only reduce the number of people who drive to work by 4.4 percent.

To achieve substantial reductions in fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions the city will need a significant shift in transport modes. Current growth levels in bus patronage will take five years to double passenger numbers. Tripling the number of residents who use the bus to travel to work rather than driving to work (from the 2006 base) would only reduce the number of people who drive to work by 4.4 percent.

OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSPORT



A survey was conducted by Palmerston North City Council in November 2010 using the Council's email panel with a number of questions about public transport and travel to work. Options for possible improvements to public transport services canvassed in the survey included:

- a. Improvements in the frequency of services**
- b. Improvements to routes – closer to home or work**
- c. Cheaper fares**
- d. Buses earlier in the morning**
- e. Buses later in the evening**

Both existing bus users and non-bus users indicated they were more likely to use the bus if more frequent buses were provided. While the survey did not canvass possible frequency levels, analysis of successful public transport systems elsewhere suggests that 10-minute frequency at peak times is the minimum for a service to be well utilised. Non-bus users were more likely to consider using a bus, even if they did not have access to a timetable, when they know there was not going to be a long wait before a bus came. Strong preference was also recorded in the survey for more bus routes in the city (which would shorten route times) and for bus services starting earlier in the morning and finishing later in the evening.

The survey also asked how often people would use the bus if it was free. The responses indicated that the service would be used more often but the increase in regular bus users was small:

- 8 percent would use the bus five or more times a week compared with 4 percent at present
- 15 percent would use the bus 1 to 4 times a week compared with 2 percent at present
- 25 percent would use the bus less than once a month compared with 15 percent at present

- 42 percent indicated they would never use the bus or that no public transport was available in their area

(Note: 74 percent had not used a bus in the last 12 months)

People who use a car regularly to drive to work were asked how much they pay for parking on a weekly basis and 85 percent indicated they currently pay nothing. The average amount paid weekly by all car drivers was \$1.70 a week. The current District Plan has required businesses to provide a high level of onsite car parking but it is proposed to remove this requirement under the current review of the District Plan. However, the amount of parking already in place means the effect of any change to the District Plan will take a long time to change the amount of parking available.

One option for addressing this, therefore, could be to encourage major employers to consider introducing parking charges in return for the introduction of free bus services, reflecting the success of the Massey and UCOL scheme which has been operating since February 2005. In the year to March 2011, 572,517 journeys were made by Massey staff and students and 84,018 journeys were made by UCOL staff and students, accounting for 59 percent of total bus journeys in the city. Massey University and UCOL jointly contributed \$418,000 towards the cost of free bus services for staff and students in the 2009-10 financial year, a cost to Massey and UCOL of 73 cents per journey.

The Council will also review the impact of its parking policy on bus usage. This will include an evaluation of an expansion to the existing zone for parking charges in the city.

The survey of city residents in November 2010 suggests some residents will not use public transport to travel to work, regardless of any improvements made to the level of service. Key reasons for driving to work included the provision of a company vehicle, convenience (particularly when needing to take children to childcare or school on the way to work) and needing to transport bulky or heavy items to work. However there was a strong desire to see an improvement in services. There was very strong support to the question "Do you think we should be encouraging people to make more of their trips on public transport in the future?" with 79 percent ticking "Yes, encourage more public transport use." There was a lower but still positive level of support for the question "Do you think Palmerston North City Council and Horizons Regional Council should be investing more or less money in public transport in the future?" Responses were:

- a. Invest more in public transport in the future - 57 percent
- b. Maintain the current level of public transport investment - 37 percent
- c. Invest less money in public transport in the future - 5 percent

CAPITAL CONNECTION RAIL SERVICE

Only two questions were included in the Council's Panel survey on the Capital Connection rail service, since a more detailed survey was planned once the financial viability of the existing service was confirmed.

More residents indicated they had used the Capital Connection compared with the bus service within Palmerston North, with 27 percent of residents indicated they had used the train in the last year, slightly higher than the 24 percent of residents who had used a bus in the city during the last year. The residents who used the Capital Connection made an average 2.6 trips during the previous year. The majority of people had used the train once or twice during the past year.

Data from the 2006 Census suggests that a very small proportion of residents use the Capital Connection to travel to work but the patronage data confirms that a higher number of residents use the service to travel to Wellington each day. The Census data also shows that some passengers boarding the train in Palmerston North live outside the city, with Tararua, Rangitikei and Manawatu District residents among the passengers boarding the train on 7 March 2006.

The 2007 Horizons Regional Council report Passenger Rail Opportunities in the Horizons Region by Dr Dave Weston suggested around 100 passengers boarded the train daily in Palmerston North, Waikanae and Paraparaumu and smaller numbers in Shannon, Levin and Otaki. The long-term financial viability of improved Capital Connection services depends largely on the level of patronage by Kapiti Coast and Horowhenua residents. Current indications of patronage since the extension of commuter train services to Waikanae suggest there has been little change in the level of patronage of the Capital Connection by Kapiti Coast residents, even though the service is competing with commuter services which are subsidised by the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

An online survey by MP Iain Lee-Galloway suggests there is significant interest in increasing the number of services offered, increasing the travel options for people attending meetings or working in Wellington. This would benefit residents of both the Horizons and Greater Wellington Regional Councils. There is anecdotal evidence that some Palmerston North residents already drive to Waikanae to catch an earlier or later commuter train service to Wellington in preference to driving to Wellington. There are also options to use the enhanced train services to provide public transport options for Kapiti Coast and Horowhenua residents who work in Palmerston North.



ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

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Economic Implications of Improvements to Public Transport Services

Financial analysis prepared in November 2008 by Charter Keck Cramer, an Australian strategic property consulting business, suggests that excessive car dependency can impact on the ability of households to achieve key economic and social objectives. Their analysis was based on the opportunity cost of car ownership based on estimated operating costs for a medium sized car. The estimates prepared suggested that if an Australian household reduced their vehicle ownership by one car, the saving in reduced ownership and running costs would result in the opportunity for households to:

- Accumulate in excess of an additional \$1 million in superannuation over their working life (in 2008 dollars); or
- Purchase a house which is \$110,000 more expensive than they would otherwise be able to; or
- Repay a \$300,000 housing loan in 12 years instead of 25 years, an in doing so save \$245,000 in interest payments over the life of the loan.

Results from the 2006 Census show that 35 percent of Palmerston North households had access to two vehicles and a further 14 percent had access to three or more vehicles, giving a total of 49 percent of city households with access to more than one vehicle. Improvements to public transport services provide the opportunity for households to reduce their level of vehicle ownership, offering significant potential financial savings for households.

Employment in bus transport services in Palmerston North has increased strongly over the last ten years, reflecting the significant growth in patronage and the level of service provided. The proposed enhancements to public transport services will provide further growth in employment levels. While this growth in public transport services will to some extent offset other household expenditure in the city (due to higher expenditure on bus fares), benefits to economic well-being will come from:

- A possible increase in central government public transport subsidies for the city, and
- the financial benefits for households from reduced car ownership. New Zealand Transport Agency data shows vehicle ownership has been declining in the Palmerston North postal area since 2007.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increasing the frequency of city bus services**
2. **Extending the hours of operation of bus services**
3. **Improving bus routes**
4. **Expanding the Capital Connection rail service**
5. **Council parking policy supporting public transport**
6. **Identifying new and innovative ways to ensure public transport is affordable for everyone in the city.**
7. **To ensure joined-up policy and implementation a joint working party between the City Council and Horizons Regional Council is established to investigate possible enhancements to city and regional bus services.**



FUTURE PUBLIC TRANSPORT?

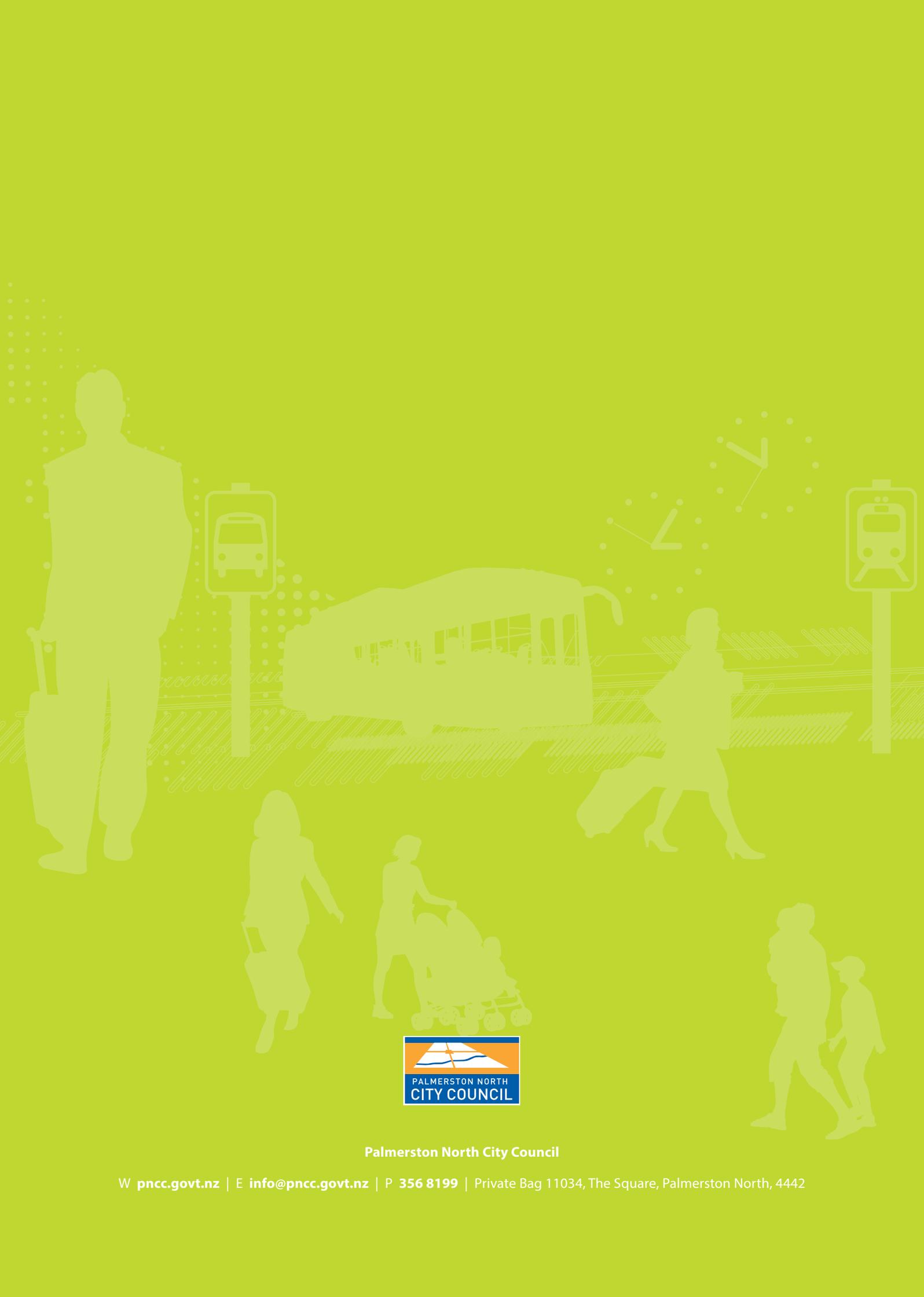
What might future public transport provision in Palmerston North look like?

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Some suggestions of potential options subject to further investigation, planning and funding

Increased frequency of bus services	10 minute frequency at peak times and 20 minutes at other times
Extended hours of operation of bus services	Bus services commence at 6am and run through to 10pm on Monday to Friday Saturday and Sunday operating hours are extended
Improved bus routes	90% of the city's population living within 400m of a bus stop Enhanced services to Linton, Aokautere, Longburn and Ashhurst Extension of the Feilding to Palmerston North bus service to Massey University and Linton at peak times Development of commuter bus services to Foxton, Dannevirke, Pahiatua and Wanganui An orbiter bus service linking the railway station, hospital, airport and other key venues in the city Improved bus services to business zones in the city
Expanded Capital Connection rail service	Six services a day (Monday to Friday) and two services a day at weekends
Council parking policy supports public transport	Minimum parking provisions are removed in the District Plan for businesses in the Inner Business Zone and are reduced in other business zones Parking charge zones and residents only parking zones in the city are extended
Other changes	Free workplace commuter bus services are funded in part by individual employers Targeted workplace travel schemes for employees with shifts starting before or finishing after scheduled bus services Promotion of more flexible work hours to enhance the use of public transport services and reduce traffic congestion Real-time timetable information is provided





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