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Committee Passenger Transport
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Human Rights Commission - Inquiry into Accessible Public Land Transport

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee of the Human Rights Commission inquiry into accessible public land transport, its timetable and how Councillors will be able to contribute to a Council submission to the inquiry.

2. Background

The Committee has been kept informed of the possibility of an inquiry into accessible public land transport being instigated by the Human Rights Commission (see report to 17 July 2003 committee meeting). **Attachment 1** is a copy of the finalised terms of reference for the inquiry.

3. Comment

The council is a major player in public land transport and our views will play an important part in the inquiry. There are others directly involved in the provision of public land transport and the access to it, in particular, operators of bus and rail services and territorial local authorities. There are also a range of other agencies that influence process and procedures such as the LTSA, OSH and ACC. The national transport funder, Transfund New Zealand, also has a major role to play. This Human Rights Commission led inquiry will hopefully better clarify the responsibilities of all these parties, provide some national standards and through it influence future government policy and where necessary funding if this is an issue.

For example there are currently no national standards regarding what is a fully accessible bus. Operators, such as Stagecoach, when purchasing new buses have relied upon the fact that all new buses are low floor or super low floor and have insisted on the interiors being in accordance with the UK accessible standards. The Council has a policy encouraging the purchase of such vehicles and has accepted this “standard” for want of anything better.

Local authorities, such as Wellington City, have over time as street works allow, raised the height of curb edges at bus stops to provide more level access between the pavement and the bus.

Overall the Council has made strong progress towards fully accessible public transport in our region within our financial ability. However much remains to be done.

Access to trolley buses, the Masterton rail carriages and to a lesser extent the Wellington urban rail rolling stock is problematic. The prototype new (refurbished) trolley bus overcomes the access problem. Improving access to rail is a long term challenge. Currently, for health and safety reasons, Tranz Metro does not allow motorised wheelchair access to Wellington urban rail units.

The place of the specialist Total Mobility Scheme, that originated in our region, needs to be considered by the Commission. We started the scheme to provide people with a disability, that could not access traditional passenger transport, for whatever reason, the same level of mobility as the rest of the community. This is often a superior service to the bus, being 24 hour 7 days a week door to door, however it can be expensive for the user as well as the Council as funder.

The inquiry by the Human Rights Commission will examine all these issues and will assist in providing direction for the future. Their findings will be applicable across the country. We see this inquiry as a positive contribution to the further development of the passenger transport system of the region.

4. Towards a submission

The inquiry time scale indicates that submissions and hearings will be in the period April to June 2004. The Council should make a submission and formally present it to the Commission. To start the process of developing a submission a workshop for all Councillors will be held, a draft submission will then be developed by officers, a second workshop might then be held and the submission finalised at the March 2004 Passenger Transport Committee meeting.

5. Communications

The submission, once developed, will provide a basis for communication with stakeholders.

6. Recommendation

That the report be received

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Attachment

1. Copy of the terms of reference for the inquiry