

14 April 2023

File Ref: OIAPR-1274023063-1155

[REDACTED]

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

### **Request for information 2023-067**

I refer to your request for information dated 15 March 2023, which was received by Greater Wellington Regional Council (Greater Wellington) on 15 March 2023. You have requested the following:

- *“How many dedicated school bus routes there are and how many school bus services Metlink provides per day?”*
  - *If you can easily produce a list of these routes, that would be much appreciated*
- *How many school students currently use your services, and what proportion of these use urban vs dedicated school services (if possible)? If you are able to provide some (very high level) split by area that would be excellent*
- *Several other agencies group their school services into separate units, rather than geographically with public services on the same corridor. Can you please tell me what the rationale was for Metlink choosing the latter?*
- *When the current contracts were developed, was consideration given to allowing a lower vehicle quality standard for school buses? Why was this not adopted other than for interim fleet?*
- *If any school bus routes have been removed in the last two years, and if any further routes are under consideration for removal? If so, what were the policy grounds for these withdrawals and how were complaints managed?*
- *Do you receive complaints that the school bus policy as set out in 6.7c of the RPTP 2021 is too strict or not sufficiently customer friendly? How do you generally respond to such complaints?*
- *Are there any specific eligibility criteria for students using school services, other than what is in the RPTP?*
- *Are you aware of schools which charter school buses commercially in addition to or in place of Metlink services, and if so how many?*

- *Is there anything else relevant to your experience providing school buses which you think may be beneficial for another local government public transport agency to know?"*

**Greater Wellington's response follows:**

We have provided each of your questions below with our response to each respectively. For clarity we have numbered each question.

*1. How many dedicated school bus routes there are and how many school bus services Metlink provides per day?*

There are 123 school bus routes, which operate 1092 services per week (218 per day on average). Some routes run only in the morning or only in the afternoon, and some routes run once a day in one direction on some days and twice a day in one direction on others to meet differing school bell times.

*2. If you can easily produce a list of these routes, that would be much appreciated*

Please refer to **Attachment 1** which contains a list of the school bus routes.

*3. How many school students currently use your services, and what proportion of these use urban vs dedicated school services (if possible)? If you are able to provide some (very high level) split by area that would be excellent*

We do not have specific data for the number of school students that currently use our services, therefore we are refusing this part of your request under section 17(g) of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 (the Act) on the basis that the information requested is not held by Greater Wellington and have no grounds for believing that the information is held by another local authority or a department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

However, Greater Wellington can provide data relating to children boarding bus services during times at the beginning and end of a usual school day. Please refer to **Attachment 2** which contains the bus passenger boardings for children on public services, and for school services for July 2022 through to March 2023 between 07:00am and 08:59am and 14:30 and 15:59 by month, and by city.

*4. Several other agencies group their school services into separate units, rather than geographically with public services on the same corridor. Can you please tell me what the rationale was for Metlink choosing the latter?*

The network operated today reflects what is in the Regional Public Transport Plan and was implemented with new Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) bus partnering contracts in 2018. Given Metlink's desire to present all its routes as a single network, there was no advantage to splitting school services off into separate units. Grouping services based on geography rather than service type allows for efficiencies to be gained when operators are compiling their shifts. Most Wellington City units contain a mix of Core, Local and Targeted (including school) services. A unit

containing only school services would likely be highly inefficient to operate, and difficult to recruit or retain staff for one single piece of work in the morning and afternoon. For these reasons, such a unit would likely be unattractive to operators to tender for, and we may have ended up with a situation where operators tendered for the public routes in an area but not the school routes. The unit structure we adopted does fairly well at spreading the operational burden of school services across each of the units.

*5. When the current contracts were developed, was consideration given to allowing a lower vehicle quality standard for school buses? Why was this not adopted other than for interim fleet?*

Metlink wished to maintain the same accessibility and emissions standards for school buses as the general fleet. We have allowed three operators to reintroduce older vehicles to their fleet in order to meet short-term fleet size increases before new vehicles can be procured. These 'interim fleet' vehicles operated on Metlink services in the short term by Tranzurban, NZ Bus, and Uzabus were only used on school services. Existing fleet operated by NZ Bus and Mana Coach Services until new buses arrived since the start of PTOM contracts were allowed to be operated on both public services and school services.

*6. If any school bus routes have been removed in the last two years, and if any further routes are under consideration for removal? If so, what were the policy grounds for these withdrawals and how were complaints managed?*

Please refer to the May 2021 routes list which is the second tab of **Attachment 1** for withdrawals since May 2021 and justifications for withdrawal. These withdrawals were mainly of routes which were out of policy (serving schools which were not the nearest zoned public school where an alternative public service exists) and had low usage. Many of these timetable changes were made in July and September 2021, to improve reliability for the wider network as part of our response to the shortage of bus drivers. At that time all affected schools were contacted directly and notified of changes to their bus services along with alternative travel options for affected students.

We have investigated combining Routes 673 and 674 into one route but have no immediate plans to do this as we do not have a large enough single-decker bus in our fleet. We have also investigated operating Route 612 with two buses rather than three, as the loadings are on the borderline of whether the third bus is required.

Another change we are considering is replacing (afternoon-only) Route 682 with a school extension of Route 19. We did the same with (morning-only) Route 647 in July 2021, which was effectively a morning version of the same route.

*7. Do you receive complaints that the school bus policy as set out in 6.7c of the RPTP 2021 is too strict or not sufficiently customer friendly? How do you generally respond to such complaints?*

We have not received any complaints that our policy as set out in the Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) is too strict. However, we receive requests for new school services reasonably often, a significant proportion of which would be out-of-policy. In these cases, we refer customers to our policy, public service options, and charter providers who may be able to operate a service commercially if desired.

*8. Are there any specific eligibility criteria for students using school services, other than what is in the RPTP?*

There are no other specific eligibility criteria for students using school services.

*9. Are you aware of schools which charter school buses commercially in addition to or in place of Metlink services, and if so how many?*

We do not keep records of this as chartered school buses are a private arrangement rather than an exempt service as defined in the Land Transport Management Act 2003 and as such are not required to be registered under our RPTP. Therefore, we are refusing this part of your request for information under section 17(g) of the Act on the basis that the information requested is not held by Greater Wellington and there are no grounds for believing that the information is held by another local authority or a department or Minister of the Crown or organisation.

We are aware that Scots College, Whitby Collegiate and Wellesley College all charter buses to meet their needs which are not covered by our school bus policy. Samuel Marsden Collegiate and Hutt International Boys' School have had charter services in the recent past, although we are unaware whether these services still operate. Operators are not required to register chartered school buses with Greater Wellington, therefore the situation may change at any time, and there may or may not be other chartered school buses of which we are not aware.

*10. Is there anything else relevant to your experience providing school buses which you think may be beneficial for another local government public transport agency to know?*

We do not hold any specific information or reports that Greater Wellington or Metlink could provide in response to this question. We will contact you to discuss this aspect further.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'sugar', with a small flourish at the end.

Samantha Gain

Kaiwhakahaere Matua Waka-ā-atea | General Manager Metlink

PROACTIVE RELEASE