Committee   Sustainable Transport Committee
Author   David Boyd, Customer Experience Leader

A Strategy for Improving Public Transport Customer Information

1   Purpose

This report provides the Committee with a recommendation for a Public Transport Customer Information Strategy to be adopted and included as part of a revised Public Transport Plan.

2   Background

A specific focus on customer experience and the application of customer experience methods in the past year has resulted in the identification of a number of initiatives to achieve the 2014 Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan (PT Plan) objectives of improving accessibility of services and growing public transport patronage, especially at peak times. This has enabled GWRC to better understand, prioritise and target customer service improvements and patronage growth opportunities.

The initiatives include the analysis of the Annual Passenger Satisfaction Survey to identify a 'hit-list' of priority improvements and the undertaking of a customer segmentation of the region's traveling public (in partnership with Massey University's design research facility, Toi Aria / Design for Public Good) to understand and identify the different needs and behaviours of existing and potential public transport customers.

Travellers have been segmented based on:

- Their life-stage: Including college students, tertiary students, working adults, non-working adults and retired adults; and
- Their use and preferences regarding public transport, including behavioural segments we have classified as; Dependents (people who rely on public transport); Willing dependents (people who choose to rely on public transport); Agnostics (people who use public transport as well as other modes) and Independents (people who prefer to use private transport);

- Aligning these segments with GWRC transport modelling data has enabled us to quantify the size and geographic location of these segments.

Insights from the customer segmentation have highlighted a number of areas for improving the customer experience, including ease of payment and ticketing, driver/guard behaviour, peak crowding and the frequency of services outside of peak. The most significant of these was the provision of information to help customers to plan their journey.

As well as influencing the accessibility and satisfaction of public transport with existing customers (by providing real-time information about services and service disruptions), recent insights point to the benefit of providing rich digital information to infrequent and new public transport customers to promote the value of public transport and encourage its adoption.

The importance of customer information is a consistent theme with other recently undertaken customer research, including the annual passenger satisfaction survey and bus interchange related field research.

A summary of recent public transport customer segmentation findings is provided in **Attachment 1**.

3   Customer information considerations

3.1   Customer information is a key asset

Customers have identified the information they receive to help them plan their journey, particularly information received online, as a key influence on the public transport customer experience. On this basis, GWRC should consider customer information as a key customer experience 'asset', which is as important and considered with as much specific focus as our other assets, such as stops, stations, rolling stock, lines and routes and payment facilities.

3.2   Everyday digital interactions are rapidly changing customer expectations of information

In the relatively short time real-time passenger information has been available in the Wellington Region (since 2011), customers have come to expect accurate and responsive information to help them plan their public transport journey.

The same is true for digital innovation in all areas of our customers' lives, whether it be 'Googling', banking or shopping, it is continually introducing our customers to new, more responsive and easier ways of doing things.

The sum of all these interactions has created new expectations of information for public transport customers, including expectations of:

- Actual real-time information, rather than predicted – the ability to see where a vehicle is now and see exactly when it will arrive (eg. as experienced through GPS)
- Comparisons between travel modes that allow an informed travel choice to be made:

- o The actual door-to-door cost for different travel modes, such as public transport, driving (including fuel, wear-and-tear and parking), Uber or taxi;
- o The actual time, including the influence of travel conditions now and for the journey home, such as the weather, road works, planned disruptions and road congestion.
- Information about loading and comfort on public transport vehicles, such as whether seats are available on any given service.

Travellers who chose alternative travel modes (the 'Agnostic' and 'Independent' customer segments) believe the smarter, real-time information about public transport, available at their finger-tips would encourage them to use public transport more.

3.3 Positioning public transport in a digital marketplace for travel

The greater availability of travel information online is increasingly providing customers access to a wider range of travel choices. To be competitive with other modes of travel, public transport providers must start providing information that allows it to be compared as a viable option.

A number of independent travel apps (such as Google Maps, Embark, TripGo) are already using Metlink data to present Metlink services as an option, comparing door to door travel times and costs, alongside other travel modes such as driving or catching an Uber.

Local and global transport operators and technology providers are exploring and trialling 'smart travel' or 'mobility as a service' (MaaS) offerings which combine real-time travel mode choice, with integrated ticketing. NZTA has an MaaS service pilot planned for Dunedin and Auckland Airport this year.

The predicted increase in travel choices, through vehicle sharing, electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles and expanded Uber-styled services (such as Uber Shuttle) will add new travel choices into the market increase competition for travel services.

The opportunities for public transport providers actively participating in this travel marketplace are exposure to a much wider customer base and patronage growth. The risk of not participating is that public transport becomes positioned as a lesser choice and suffers a decline in patronage over time.

This is an important consideration given more than 95% of the region's peak travellers see public transport as a choice, rather than a necessity, for their travel.

3.4 The role of GWRC in providing digital information to customers

The Metlink website and app provides definitive and useful information to existing Metlink customers and it is envisaged that it will continue to serve this purpose, with continual improvement to keep pace with customers' expectations of usability.

However as GWRC seeks to increase its reach and target patronage growth through new and niche customer groups, an opportunity exists to provide

customer information through third-party, independent websites and apps by providing Metlink open-source data and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) that allow easy integration of data and information. This would enable GWRC to reach a wider range of customers at a lower cost, by reducing the overhead of supporting non-core GWRC activity of specialist in-house web development and paying web development suppliers.

Independent travel information websites and apps can also provide a level of specialisation and innovation unlikely to be available to a relatively small organisation such as GWRC.

An example of this model is MetService, who as well as having their own website, also provide their data through numerous other third-party websites where people also consume weather information.

4 The Public Transport Customer Information Strategy

4.1 Strategy outcomes

The public transport customer information strategy is an approach for managing information and data relating to public transport services so it meets the changing needs and expectations of our existing and potential customers, by:

- Providing more accurate real-time information through a system that is future proofed to meet increasing demands for accuracy;
- Providing a greater range of information to allow customers to make a more informed choice about their travel;
- Providing robust open-source data and information through our customers' channel of choice, including third-party/independent travel websites and apps to increase the reach of public transport information, access best practice digital innovation and reduce our overhead cost for web-development; and
- Ensuring our data and information can be easily integrated into future 'smart travel' and 'Mobility as a Service' platforms so public transport is competitive in a digital travel market place for travel.

The implementation of this strategy falls into three focus areas that are set out below.

Focus Area 1: Immediate Fixes		Timeframe: By June 2018
Objective	Activities	Target outcomes
Improve the awareness, usability and adoption of the Metlink website and app. **Customer insights** - The Metlink website and app provide much of the basic utility regular customers are seeking - However, there is low awareness of the Metlink	- Improved awareness about Metlink.org and Metlink Commuter app - Improved usability of Metlink.org for 'spacial' navigators & current non-users - More use of social media as an additional channel for information about delays and disruptions	- Improve satisfaction for existing public transport customers - Migrate more existing customers online and reduce the cost of other customer information channels, including TXT notification and the call centre.

website and app with some customer segments • Some customers find the Metlink website difficult to use.	• Improved access to Snapper information through Metlink.org • Improved information on buses about behaviour expectations – personal hygiene, standing, etc • Improved accuracy of current real-time information system • On-bus real-time information and stop announcements • Digital information at stops and interchanges – connecting services, network maps • Establish Metlink data & API protocols for 3rd party use.	

Focus Area 2: Optimisation		Timeframe: 2018/19
Objective	Activities	Target outcomes

Improve the quality and reach of public transport information to customers to meet their growing expectations of digital information.
 	
Customer insights
 	
• Customers have a growing expectation of digital information based on their experience of other digital services, including travel related services (such as Google Maps and Uber).
 	
• Numerous 3rd-party/ independent travel info apps and platforms already exist for Metlink information to be presented.
 	
• Less frequent and non-users will be encouraged to adopt public transport if:
 	
   o They could make a more informed choice about how it compares with other travel options (cost, comfort and time)
 	
   o They could consume
	• Provision of additional real-time variables – weather, road congestion, seat occupancy on vehicles
	
	• Personal notifications for when a selected service is due
	
	• Comparative information on door-to-door **travel time** to inform mode choice (PT/walking/ biking/driving/taxiing)
	
	• Comparative information on door-to-door **costs/fares** to inform mode choice (PT/walking/ biking/driving/taxiing)
	
	• Promotion of open-source public transport data and APIs for development by third parties/independent websites and apps.
		• Improve satisfaction for existing customers
		
		• Increase public transport use by less frequent users
		
		• Encourage public transport adoption by new and non- users
		
		• Make public transport an ongoing preference for students as they enter the work-force
		
		• Ensure the 2018 network delivers a measurable improvement in customer experience.

the information through their digital channel of choice – whether Metlink or an independent provider. • Some regular users will find it easier to consume information through an independent provider.		

Focus area 3: Transformation		Timeframe: 2018/19
Objective	Activities	Target outcomes
Future-proof our information technology so it can be easily integrated into 'smart travel/Mobility as a Service' (MaaS) platforms, so public transport can compete as a viable option in a 'market for mobility'. **Customer insights** • Emerging transport choices (Uber, car sharing) will reduce the cost and increase competition for first/last mile travel • Most of our existing customers use public transport by choice, leaving us vulnerable to competition from existing and emerging transport alternatives (such as Uber or car sharing) • Many of our customers already see the value in merging travel information and payment on a single smart travel platform • MaaS-type capability is emerging in pilots and strategies of other transport providers, world-wide & in NZ.	• Personalised travel/journey data to let customers plan and save preferred journeys • Integration of public transport and other travel mode info (times, cost, status, journey plans) with public transport ticketing and payment capability.	• Retain existing customers in a competitive market • Increase public transport use by less frequent users • Encourage public transport adoption by new and non-users • Future proof public transport in the Wellington region from the risk of commercial competition and digital disruption.

4.2 Resourcing of the strategy

It is anticipated the strategy can be implemented within existing activities and budgets for public transport information technology.

5 Consideration of Climate Change

The matters requiring decision in this report have been considered by officers in accordance with the process set out in the GWRC Climate Change Consideration Guide.

5.1 Mitigation assessment

Mitigation assessments are concerned with the effect of the matter on the climate (i.e. the greenhouse gas emissions generated or removed from the atmosphere as a consequence of the matter) and the actions taken to reduce, neutralise or enhance that effect.

Officers have considered the effect of the matters on the climate and recommend that the effect is not significant. Providing improved customer information will maintain and increase patronage of public transport, which will contribute to an overall reduction in gross regional greenhouse gas emissions. As patronage data is collected, the impact upon emissions can be estimated.

5.2 Adaptation assessment

Adaptation assessments relate to the impacts of climate change (e.g. sea level rise or an increase in extreme weather events), and the actions taken to address or avoid those impacts.

Officers recommend that climate change impacts have no direct relevance to the matters addressed by this paper.

6 The decision-making process and significance

The matters requiring decision in this report have been considered by officers against the requirements of Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act). Part 6 sets out the obligations of local authorities in relation to the making of decisions.

6.1 Significance of the decision

Part 6 requires Greater Wellington Regional Council to consider the significance of the decision. The term 'significance' has a statutory definition set out in the Act.

Officers have considered the significance of the matter, taking the Council's significance and engagement policy and decision-making guidelines into account. Officers recommend that the matter be considered to have low significance, as the decisions are consistent with existing Council policy as set out in the Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan 2014.

The subject matter of this report will be incorporated into the decision making process for the next major review of the Regional Public Transport Plan, that will lead to the Council making a decision of high significance within the meaning of the Local Government Act 2002. That decision-making process and consultation requirements are explicitly prescribed for by sections 124 and 125 of the Land Transport Management Act 2003.

Officers do not consider that a formal record outlining consideration of the decision-making process is required in this instance.

6.2 Engagement

This report has been informed through customer engagement including market research, ethnographic interviews and customer workshops. In accordance with the significance and engagement policy, no engagement on the matters for decision is required until the decisions are incorporated into the next review of the Regional Public Transport Plan.

7 Communication

Progress on implementing initiatives referred to in this report will be reported through the normal communication channels, including reports to this Committee.

8 Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives*** *the report.*

2. ***Notes*** *the content of the report.*

3. ***Notes*** *that customer experience engagement has highlighted rising expectations of the quality, responsiveness and usability of digital information about public transport services, and that customer expectations are expected to continue to rise rapidly in line with other digital innovations.*

4. ***Agrees*** *to adopt the Customer Information Strategy set out in this report.*

5. ***Requests*** *that officers undertake ongoing customer segmentation to identify, prioritise and target customer experience improvements and patronage growth.*

6. ***Notes*** *that the next review of the Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan updates the policies and actions in section 5.4 of the Plan relating to creating an effective connection with customers, to emphasise the importance of a managed approach for developing public transport information for customers.*

Report prepared by: Report approved by:

David Boyd   **Wayne Hastie**
Customer   General Manager,
Experience Leader   Public Transport

Attachment 1:   Public Transport Customer Segmentation Summary, March 2017