



caring about you & your environment

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Report to Environment Committee
from Geoff Skene, Manager, Environment Co-ordination

Ecobus Update

1. Purpose

To inform the Committee about progress with the mobile facility (“Ecobus”) for the Council’s environmental education programmes.

2. Background

When the Council’s environmental education programmes were established, provision was made for a vehicle to extend the delivery of those programmes and their messages to as many school children and community members as possible (i.e., a roadshow). The concept was of a mobile display and education facility which would help raise awareness about the environment generally and contribute to the delivery of the school based programme (*Take Action*). At present, we colloquially refer to this as the “Ecobus”, although the actual vehicle will be a large van (long wheel base Ford Transit).

We have been working on this project for 18 months and have made considerable progress. The bulk of the funding for the Ecobus is in this present year’s Annual Plan. This update provides information on the progress we have made since my last discussion of the vehicle in my Manager’s report to the Committee in August.

3. Use of the Ecobus with Schools

The Ecobus is a key part of the Take Action programme. Its first use with each school is when the Action Crew (WRC staff taking the programme) arrive to excite and engage the children about the programme. The Action Crew stage a one-hour multi-media presentation in the school hall for the 90-120 children doing the programme. This performance relies on the immediacy, vibrancy, and perceived “importance” of

film and television to excite the children about taking action (“if its on TV, it must be important”).

The children see that the Action Crew uses the film/TV medium to collect visual records of schools taking action for the environment and to spread their messages to new schools and the public generally. Elements of the set for the presentation and the graphic treatment of the Ecobus exterior give the appearance of a video production unit and add to this effect. The external appearance of the Ecobus will be eye-catching, and attention grabbing, and reinforce the arrival and presence at the school of the Action Crew.

Throughout the remainder of a school’s involvement in the programme the Action Crew lead children’s learning and record the solutions they come up with. The Ecobus will be on site intermittently in these situations to reinforce the message. At the end of the programme the Crew return in the Ecobus, presenting the children with certificates, showing the video record that’s been collected. The high visibility of the vehicle will serve to promote the Council and Take Action whenever it is on the road.

Work on this use of the vehicle is well advanced. The multi-media presentation will be completed shortly and the components of the set are being designed and constructed at present. As it takes approximately ten weeks to have the vehicle itself delivered to New Zealand, the presentation will initially need to be transported to the schools doing the programme this term by other means.

4. Promoting Change in Environmental Behaviour and Attitudes

The ways in which people live their lives day-to-day have a fundamental bearing on the environment. While the large industrial pollution spill may grab the headlines, much more environmental degradation occurs simply through the accumulated minor impacts of the everyday activities of people and communities. Air pollution from cars and the effects of our uses of energy are examples. The Regional Policy Statement recognises this: there are numerous methods in that document which seek the better management of natural resources through people learning to look after those resources in new ways.

One of the functions of the Environment Co-ordination Department is to raise public awareness about the environment and encourage people to look after it in a more sustainable way. The basis for this is the Department’s role in co-ordinating and implementing the Regional Policy Statement.

We are designing the Ecobus so that it can perform a public information role and be used to promote more sustainable ways of living. It will be used to communicate the Council’s sustainability message at events such as field day and festivals, and in other venues such as supermarket car parks, and so on. Our proposed approach is to achieve this through an exhibition based around the theme of improving our quality of life by changing the way we treat the environment. People will be able to explore this theme through interactive modules, video presentations, and display material. It will be relevant to people’s experience and knowledge because it will be based on the issues

we know they are most concerned about (we have a good knowledge of these from our survey of environmental behaviour. See Report 01.676.). These are:

- The growing volume of waste
- Pollution of streams and beaches
- Air pollution from vehicles /global warming
- The state of the bush/impact of possums and weeds
- Our uses of energy

It will provide people with simple alternatives that are memorable and fun, and demonstrate what's in it for them, such as a better quality of life and reduced costs. Like the rest of the environmental education programmes, the emphasis will be on action. The Ecobus will communicate ways in which people can act to deal with these issues and contribute to their solutions in their daily lives.

5. **Relationship to Council Promotion and Branding**

There are clear connections between this project and the Council's more general thrust towards sustainable development and a sustainable Region. I expect that the timing of this aspect of the Ecobus and the design of the vehicle's external livery will be able to be managed so that it is fully in accord with the Council's wider communication programme. The vehicle will be highly visible on the streets and make a significant impact in communicating the Council to residents and ratepayers. It is thus being developed in full consultation with the Strategic Communications Manager.

6. **Communication**

At this stage there are no benefits to be gained from making the process of developing the Ecobus more publicly known.

7. **Recommendation**

That the report be received and the contents noted.

Report prepared by:

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