



Report **03.310**
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Committee **Passenger Transport**
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Image Improvement - Hutt Valley Bus Services

1. Purpose

To provide details of the process for improving the image of the Hutt Valley bus services.

2. Background

A review of the bus services in the Hutt Valley was conducted last year in order to improve bus services and increase patronage. The launch of the resulting improvements to services is now planned for the end of October 2003, instead of June and October, which allows more time for implementation and will be more cost effective than having two launches.

As part of the review we conducted qualitative research to determine current and potential users perceptions of existing services, the actual and perceived barriers to using public transport and the opportunities for growing patronage. This research showed that there was a poor perception/image of public transport in the Hutt Valley, which is a key barrier to growing patronage.

Other barriers to using public transport will start to be improved from October: frequency, reliability, customer service, integration, fleet quality, information and infrastructure. However, it is not enough to simply make operational changes without also addressing the image of the services too; we need to distinguish the improved services from what has gone before.

We have, therefore, established a process for improving the image of the Hutt Valley bus services. If successful, this may be rolled out across the region.

3. Objective

Our objective is to create a positive image for the services in the Hutt Valley. The process we have established will determine the design of the image.

We are looking to develop the following:

- A system identifier, which would provide a visual means of linking all elements of the public transport system in the Hutt Valley: the new look timetables, posters, adverts, the website, bus stop stickers, infrastructure, promotional material and transport modes.
- Imagery to distinguish the new core services from the community routes. The core services have a distinct product offering; they are high frequency routes that link key destinations, with improved accessibility and longer hours of operation. The community routes will provide extensive coverage but will operate at lower frequencies and will have more limited hours of operation.

There will also be acknowledgement of Greater Wellington, as the funder of the public transport network, on promotional material and fleets.

Stagecoach has indicated that it makes sense to have a system identifier for the whole region rather than just the Hutt Valley, which could be launched initially in the Hutt Valley and then rolled out across the region. We are discussing this option with Mana and will report the outcome at the next Committee meeting.

4. The Hutt Valley Focus Group Research

The research identified that services were seen as ‘solid’ (ie having good bones and elements of reliability), but also:

- weakly branded
- fragmented
- conservative
- distant
- dated
- dowdy
- uninspiring.

When likened to a car, respondents most frequently cited the image as an old Lada, Ford Falcon or Holden Kingswood. The research concluded that the Hutt Valley public transport services needed to be repackaged to maximise their potential. Key to this is developing imagery that captures people’s hearts (emotive) and minds (functional). Branding literature shows that where people have a strong relationship with a brand/image they are considerably more forgiving of deficits in products and services.

The values that people wanted associated with public transport include: modern, fast, sleek/smooth, efficient, positive, reliable, integrated, clean and safe, accessible, part of the city/urban/a network and with a sense of community/family/friendly. People’s expectations of an ideal system were not unrealistic; they were represented by a late model Toyota and not a Ferrari. The imagery/branding that is developed will reflect these values.

5. The Process

The process for improving the image of bus services in the Hutt Valley is as follows:

1. Separate workshops held with Stagecoach and GW Transport staff to collect ideas and input for the creation of a design brief for the imagery to be applied to services and core routes in the Hutt Valley and promotional material. These workshops have taken place.
2. Creating a design brief based on the outputs from (1) and the values the public wanted to see associated with public transport as identified in the market research.
3. Design concepts will be developed based on the design brief. These concepts will be presented to Stagecoach, Mana and GW Transport staff. Feedback will be collated.
4. Market research will be conducted amongst users and non-users to assess their reactions to the design concepts. Feedback will be collated.
5. Designs will be finalised based on the feedback from (3) and (4).
6. The final designs will be presented to Councillors.
7. The final design will be presented to the TLAs and other stakeholders; they will have been kept informed of the process.
8. The designs will be applied to timetables, buses, infrastructure, website, posters, advertising and promotional material, such as bus driver caps and timetable wallets, ready for the launch in October.

The designs will be presented to Councillors at the next Passenger Transport Committee on 17 July. Prior to this there will be a Councillors' workshop to present the finding from the qualitative and quantitative research conducted over the last year.

6. Communications

The images developed as a result of this process will be applied to all the communications material for the launch of improvements in October.

7. Recommendation

That this report be received.

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