

Public health fears over Wellington bus plan

15 June 2018

Wellington residents living on former trolley bus routes on the East-West corridor are facing a 200 percent increase in carcinogenic diesel pollutants for the next decade, under Greater Wellington Regional Council's new high-frequency bus network due to be phased in from July.

Research by ReVolt Wellington - a community organisation dedicated to bringing non-polluting electric buses back to the capital - also found residents along the routes will experience a 400 percent increase in noise compared to the trolley bus era. (1)

Hundreds of millions of dollars are also expected to be shaved off property values on the routes. A GWRC-commissioned report by Price Waterhouse Cooper forecast a seven percent drop as a result of the new diesel-powered network. (2)

The council decommissioned the trolley bus network to meet operating requirements brought in by the previous government. The Public Transport Operating Model forced New Zealand's regional councils to introduce a competitive business model to public transport networks and reduce their reliance on subsidy. (3)

The council's tender process failed to provide enough incentive for a change to electric buses and actively discouraged a fully electric fleet - in contradiction of its own long-term transport plan. It describes diesel buses as "the worst performing option on carbon emissions" which reduces harmful local emissions "by a smaller amount than either battery electric or diesel hybrid options." (4)

The GWRC awarded 50 percent of its bus routes to NZ BUS - which owns the trolley bus stock and a fleet of ageing diesel buses - and to MANA. The remaining 50 percent were secured through tender by Tranzit, which bought 238 new buses. 95 percent of those are diesel, with 10 electric double-decker buses on trial.

Residents are especially concerned that the west to east city corridor will be operated by NZ Bus using a fleet of ageing Euro 1, 2 and 3 diesel buses until the end of this year. Even the latest Euro 6 standard buses emit very small 2.5 micron particles which lodge in respiratory tracts and are known to cause cancers and asthma. In 2012 the World Health Organisation classified diesel as a group one carcinogenic equivalent to asbestos. (5)

NZ Bus recently signalled that the 57 ex-trolley buses which are being tested with full electric conversions could possibly be sent to other cities where they have recently won new contracts. (6)

ReVolt Wellington held a meeting at the Seatoun Village Community Hall, on Wednesday 13 June.

This was attended by Paul Eagle MP for Rongatai, GWRC Councillors and WCC Councillors.

On a cold blustery night a crowd of concerned citizens from all over Wellington attended to hear the facts of the matter.

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(1) Based on published timetable information.

(2) <http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Transport/Regional-transport/RPTP/GWRC-Bus-Fleet-Configurations-Final-version.pdf>, p62

(3) <https://www.transport.govt.nz/land/ptom/>

(4) <http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Transport/Regional-transport/RPTP/WGNDOCS-1386111-v1-FinalRPTPdocWEBversion.PDF>, p33

(5) http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2012/pdfs/pr213_E.pdf, *IARC Diesel engine exhaust carcinogenic, 12 June 2012*

(6) <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/103869609/wellingtons-60-retired-trolley-buses-could-be-converted-into-fullyelectric-vehicles>