

## **Public Transport meeting Wednesday 14 July, Chalmers Room, Port Chalmers**

Port Chalmers Transition Town (PCTT) hosted a public meeting on 14 July to discuss how to improve access to public transport. Our motivation was that good public transport not only cuts greenhouse gases, but it also strengthens communities by providing access to work, services, recreation and education both in Port and in Dunedin.

Thirty-two people attended this intense but positive meeting. Apologies were received from about ten more, including ORC councillor Michael Deaker, local politicians, Southern DHB, Otago University, and Catch the Train representatives, and local bus users.

Service providers and government agencies were represented by ORC councillor Bryan Scott, ORC Director Policy & Resource Planning Fraser McRae, DCC transport Lisa Clifford, Citibus Manager Tony Collins, and Roy Johnston for NZTA. The community at large were represented formally or informally by bus users, the Chalmers Community Board, Otago Polytechnic, Sustainable Dunedin and Harbour Cycle Network.

The ORC described the bus service improvements over the past five years. Sadly the ORC and Citibus's investment has not been matched by an equal increase in patronage. 'Use it or lose it' was the message. The meeting did note the community's appreciation of the improvements – and the excellence of our bus drivers!

The major impediments to using public transport in Dunedin are cost, timetables, overcrowding, and the convenience and habitual use of cars. The expense to families and students in particular mean that many people who want to catch the bus cannot. The school bus system is also inequitable, as it can cost more to catch a school bus than a public one.

(Concerns about the bus parking space at the bottom of George St were also discussed, which will be further investigated by NZTA. There was also an update on the Harbour Cycle Network – it has been listed for completion to Port Chalmers, but no commitment of funds or dates have been finalised).

Several immediate ways to encourage bus usage were suggested including weekly unlimited use passes or season's tickets, live arrival info at stops using the buses' GPS facilities, web-based travel planning, uni/poly student fares, free weekends for weekly users, 'outrageous' approaches to marketing the bus service, cycle racks, and employer involvement – e.g. subsidising bus not car travel or parking. The ORC and Citibus will investigate these ideas.

However, the ORC currently believes it would be a politically difficult decision to increase its subsidies for public transport. Funding is also constrained by the mechanisms by which central government matches regional government subsidies.

What this meeting did show is that many participants believe that the ORC's goal of providing a 'complementary' service to single individuals is now inadequate. It is not meeting the needs of many people, who cannot afford or who do not want to use cars. This issue is therefore much bigger than the Port Chalmers – West Harbour area alone.

The ORC is currently unable to answer what is the **value** of providing a well-used public transport system, as opposed to the **cost** of running it. Without this information, it is difficult to argue whether public funding is at an effective level. (A useful comparison might be with the free public libraries of our city, and their many, almost immeasurable and ongoing, benefits. Free public transport has not yet been examined here.)

However, even without this value analysis, given the increasing costs to individuals – and the increasingly obvious costs to the planet – of using fossil fuel, PCTT argues that we need a new transport vision for Dunedin. This would be to make public transport the most attractive option for most people. We intend to work actively with other organisations to realise this goal.

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