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To: Mailroom Mailbox
Subject: LTP Submission

To: Environment Canterbury.

I am making a submission specifically on the public transport aspect of the Long-term Plan.

Reading the list of options, I see that all three possible plans involve discontinuing six bus-routes. This appals me. The consultation document states that Ecan is “looking for the right balance” so as to maintain a sustainable service for the majority of users at best value. Focus on “the majority” is not appropriate for a service provider: buses are an essential service for a percentage of the population (as well as an option that should be available long-term for more reluctant users). Making them unavailable to some is neither right nor balanced, and providing for the majority of users while totally abandoning a minority is not a proper service. For those who have no other means of transport, removal of all buses from some routes is a deprivation that will have a significant impact on their lives: for some people, buses are the only available means of transport.

In recent months there have been letters to the Press from elderly people pointing out that removal of their local bus will mean having to walk kilometres to the next bus-stop, and/or take two or three buses to get to a destination.

Likewise the “Christchurch Mail” in January published a selection of letters sent to their “Neighbourly” website, describing how and why people do or don't use buses. There were many reasons why not, but a constant theme was infrequency, the need to catch two or three buses to get to a destination, lack of co-ordination in timetables so that

transferring from one to another often means a long wait between buses – trips often taking twice as long by bus as by bike or car. Several of these writers mentioned liking travelling by bus, but finding the loss of time unacceptable. These letters were based on services as they now are – before the latest planned service reduction. To get more people onto buses, there need to be more buses, more often, on a wider range of routes.

I myself travel once a week from Woolston to Lyttelton and back, on the 535 Eastgate-Rapaki bus. Yes, sometimes I am the only passenger (making it no doubt an “inefficient route” in some bureaucrat's opinion), but sometimes the little bus is crammed to the gunwales. These services are used, regularly though not always predictably. For myself, if the 535 is discontinued, I have to choose between an unfamiliar and longer walk to find an Opawa stop to catch the 28 Lyttelton-Papanui bus, or get a taxi to and from my regular acupuncture appointment. I am lucky I am well enough to walk to a distant bus-stop, and financially comfortable enough to pay for a taxi if necessary. A great many people on the six small bus-routes do not have either option. These services must continue.

The consultation document refers to Christchurch's “challenges resulting from lower patronage numbers”, and goes on to name some possible reasons for this low patronage, including high car ownership and increased numbers of people now living outside the city. Yes, these and others are factors, but a big part of the problem is simply that bus services are no longer as good as they used to be. On many routes, buses are infrequent. Unsurprisingly, other information reveals that the “colour” (Purple, Blue, etc) lines are well-patronised. This is because they run at least every quarter-hour: if you miss your bus by one minute, or if for some unknown reason it doesn't arrive, there will be another along very soon. This improves people's trust in the service, and makes them more likely to use it. What we need is for the smaller services to gradually become more like the colour lines – more frequent, not less. On too many routes, buses run half-hourly or

hourly. That is not really adequate – but it's a great deal better than nothing at all.

What really strikes me about the plan to reduce services, is what an inefficient response it is to the current problem. The problem is insufficient use of buses, in a city whose cyclists, pedestrians, and indeed motorists are struggling with excessive numbers of cars on the roads; yet the authority's response is to reduce the bus service. The rationale given is a need to “achieve a positive financial outcome to support development of a better network.” – but this is to be done by making a worse network! This must lead to reduced patronage, hence negative financial outcomes, and a worse image of the public transport system: once a service loses its responsiveness to the people it is supposed to serve, it takes a very long time for people to begin trusting it again. Those who have other options are not likely to be won over to a service that makes a poor job of meeting people's actual transport needs. Cut services, and the people who need those services and have no other option will simply go without – with an assortment of bad outcomes for themselves – while those who have another option will use it. Thus taking a cost-cutting approach at a time of falling patronage magnifies deprivation and social unfairness, while making patronage fall still further.

The consultation document says the authority is not aiming to operate public transport at a 'profit', but needs to look at financial performance. That sounds quite a lot like wanting to run at a profit. The problem there is a whole political system that expects public services to run like businesses. It must be extraordinarily difficult for any system to work in that environment, but it is necessary: a public service must serve the public. The suggestions of raising money through increases in fares or rates, or reducing the subsidy for Total Mobility users, are undesirable: bus fares are already a stretch for some people; in post-earthquake Christchurch, rates are already a huge burden for many; and people already facing the normal difficulties of disability do not need another financial burden. Yet any

of those options is better than cutting out services altogether! A rise in rates in particular is a reasonable prospect as the amount suggested is small. Any rise in rates to support bus services should be accompanied by a letter in every rates demand, detailing the amount of the rise and the reasons for it, including a clearly-worded reminder that meeting the needs of everyone, including elderly, disabled, and poor, is part of a civilised society; and that every potential driver travelling by bus means one car taken off the road, making roads better for all users including those who continue to drive.

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