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Purpose: *Decision Required* Date: 23/05/2025  
 Distribution: WCC/GWRC Joint Steering Group Attachments -  
 Harbour Quays Project Team

## Bus Services Decision

#	Decision Type	Description	Decision	Signature
1.	APPROVAL	Proceed with Metlink's recommendation for the phased introduction of bus services operating on the Harbour Quays, starting with <b>Option 1B: Run Express and Brandon Street services and (subject to cost) an all day harbour-side service along the Harbour Quays</b>	APPROVED / NOT APPROVED	

## Summary

1. The adopted designs for the Golden Mile have a modelled optimal capacity to accommodate a maximum of 80 buses per hour in the peak and 50 buses per hour off-peak. The designs also require the closure of access for current bus services from Brandon Street into Lambton Quay.
2. Current peak bus flows on the Golden Mile are around 100 buses per hour resulting in delays and travel time variability.
3. The Greater Wellington LTP patronage projection for 2034 is for a requirement up to 135 buses per hour to meet peak demand along the Golden Mile at which point buses will be averaging 3-6 km per hour. The severe congestion and travel time variability will make bus travel an unviable option for many commuters.
4. Beyond 130 buses per hour modelling indicates that buses would queue beyond the Golden Mile onto Bowen Street, Lambton Interchange, Thorndon Quay and Cambridge Terrace.
5. To accommodate this increase in demand a second bus corridor is required through the central city. The Harbour Quays (from Customhouse Quay through to Cable and Wakefield Streets) is the only viable alternative route to operate buses at volume.

6. Harbour Quays is an opportunity to provide customers with faster and more reliable bus journeys. It will improve access to popular destinations along Wellington’s waterfront and provide capacity for more buses to accommodate patronage growth.
7. However, shifting customers away from the long-established bus stops along the Golden Mile will be a significant change that will cause significant unease for many customers.
8. In response, Metlink proposes a phased introduction of bus services along the Harbour Quays that seeks to capitalise on the opportunity for faster more reliable journeys and the operational benefits of optimal bus numbers on the Golden Mile, to minimise customer risks of moving to the Harbour Quays.

## Recommendation

9. A phased approach is recommended for the utilization of the Harbour Quays corridor by Metlink bus services that:
  - Minimises customer transition risk.
  - Provides attractive benefits to customers, supporting the objectives for growing public transport access and mobility.
  - Can be supported with infrastructure that is affordable within the current project budget.
  - Manages Golden Mile bus numbers within the optimal capacity of that corridor.
  - Accommodates bus services displaced by the planned closure of Brandon Street.

10. The recommended staged approach is shown in the following table.

Phase 1: 2027	Phase 2: 2028-34	Phase 3: Beyond 2034
<p><b>Option 1B</b></p> <p><b>Run Express and Brandon Street services, and an all day harbour-side service along the Harbour Quays</b></p> <p>Up to 23% of PM peak and 12% of weekly patronage moves to Harbour Quays</p> <p>Faster peak journeys</p> <p>All-day, 7-day-a-week access to waterfront attractions</p> <p>Stop infrastructure requirements within current budget.</p>	<p><b>Option 2</b></p> <p><b>Run Express, Brandon Street services, all peak-only and regional services along the Harbour Quays</b></p> <p>Up to 28% of PM peak and 22% of weekly patronage moves to Harbour Quays</p> <p>Faster peak and long regional journeys</p> <p>Stop infrastructure requirements require additional investment to provide adequate shelter.</p>	<p><b>Option 3</b></p> <p><b>Run East-West services and regional services along the Harbour Quays</b></p> <p>Up to 60% of PM peak and 59% of weekly patronage moves to Harbour Quays</p> <p>Faster central city journeys over-all</p> <p>Stop infrastructure requirements require significant additional investment to provide shelter.</p> <p>Transitional step toward future mass rapid transit.</p>

## Background

### The Golden Mile will soon reach the limit for optimal bus service operations

11. The adopted designs for the Golden Mile have a modelled optimal capacity to accommodate a maximum of 80 buses per hour in the peak and 50 buses per hour off-peak. The designs also close access from Brandon Street into Lambton Quay and affected services will have to stop elsewhere in the central city.
12. Opportunity to increase capacity on the Golden Mile to accommodate these future bus flows without compromising other city traffic movements and pedestrian crossing opportunities is highly limited by key bottlenecks such as Willis Street and the available green time at traffic signals.
13. Current peak flows on the Golden Mile are around 100 buses per hour resulting in some delays and travel time variability. The Greater Wellington LTP projection of future patronage growth will require around 135 buses per hour in the peak to meet customer demand by 2034.
14. Modelling indicates the Golden Mile is physically limited to around 130 buses per hour. At this point buses will be averaging 3-6 km per hour with severe congestion, platooning of buses and resulting delay and travel time variability with peak journeys taking up to 28 minutes to travel the 2km of the Golden Mile, making bus travel unviable for many customers. Beyond 130 buses per hour modelling indicates that buses would queue back beyond the Golden Mile onto Bowen Street, Lambton Interchange, Thorndon Quay and Cambridge Terrace.
15. To accommodate anticipated bus patronage growth a second bus corridor is required through the central city. The narrow nature of the central city and many of the roads that travel through it, make the Harbour Quays (from Customhouse Quay through to Cable and Wakefield Streets) the only alternative viable route to operate buses at volume.

### Harbour Quays considerations

16. The wide streets and close proximity to the Golden Mile and waterfront attractions present opportunities for establishing a popular additional central city bus route.
17. However, this needs to be carefully considered in the context of a customer-base for central city bus services that has proven to be highly sensitive to change. Any change to long-established travel routines needs to be supported with reassurance that the change will at least provide the same level of convenience and comfort and ideally offer an improvement in service. Without this there is a risk of a public backlash and reputational damage.
18. Metlink has undertaken focus groups with central city bus customers and with its citizen panel, the Public Transport Advisory Group, to understand sensitivities associated with moving services to the Harbour Quays. These provided clear insights about what would need to be considered to make the Harbour Quays an attractive alternative:
  - The Harbour Quays would be an attractive alternative to the Golden Mile if it enabled faster bus journeys, especially at peak times.
  - Provide a high quality of shelter and amenity to, from and at bus stops to counter perceptions that the Harbour Quays is exposed to the elements.
  - Ensure there is safe and easy access to bus stops to mitigate concerns about busy traffic conditions on the Harbour Quays.
  - The Harbour Quays is an opportunity to improve access to popular waterfront attractions, Te Papa and Tākina.

19. Customer support for the change is vital and is a key consideration guiding recommendations for how bus services operate along the Harbour Quays.
20. Modelling has subsequently supported the case for the Harbour Quays enabling faster bus journeys. A time saving of between 5 to 7 minutes is a significant benefit for customers.
21. However, a key constraint is the budget available to provide high-quality shelter. The existing budget limits the size of shelter that can be provided and the number of customers that can be adequately sheltered on the more exposed Harbour Quays route.

#### **Impacts on the wider central city bus network**

22. The benefits of minimising bus congestion on the Golden Mile have been clearly established and result in both an improved customer experience and operational efficiencies.
23. A Harbour Quays route also opens new opportunities for the bus network, such as potentially providing a service along Aotea Quay to the Interisland ferry terminal and cruise ships.
24. Operationally 50 to 80 buses per hour is optimal for the Golden Mile. From an urban design perspective 60 buses per hour over-all is desirable.
25. Anything below 50 buses per hour risks undermining the vitality on the Golden Mile, and the critical city circulation role the Golden Mile plays for short trips between Courtenay Place and Wellington Station.
26. Our analysis of customer preferences and the choices they might make between using the Golden Mile and Harbour Quays assumes:
  - a. Passengers from Zone 3 and beyond will be attracted to using the Harbour Quays by faster end-to-end journey times.
  - b. Passengers travelling from Zones 2 and 1 will benefit less from the end-to-end time savings offered by the Harbour Quays and most will continue to opt for the Golden Mile. Because express services only stop at a limited number of stops in Zone 2, these passengers are also less likely to use the Harbour Quays services.
  - c. Some peak travellers from beyond Zone 2 will also prefer the proximity of Golden Mile services.
27. Passenger choice may also be dictated by proximity to their destination and daily weather and traffic conditions. For these reasons there is value in providing customers a choice to travel down either corridor.

## Harbour Quays Bus Services Options Assessment

28. Five options have been developed based on the preferred T02 design for the Harbour Quays route. The options cover a spectrum from a do minimum approach through to complete reorientation of the bus network.

- **Option 1A: Express + Brandon St services**
- **Option 1B: Express + Brandon St services + an all-day harbour-side service**
- **Option 2: Express + Brandon Street + Peak Only services + Regional buses**
- **Option 3: East-West services + Regional services**
- **Option 4: North-South services + Regional services**

29. The options are scenarios based on existing services, their bus requirements and patronage. The assessment of stop patronage was modelled on 2024 bus patronage. The final service design for each option would consider more detail, including opportunities for network improvement.

30. Forecasts for future bus requirements are based on GWRC's 2025 LTP modelling. The assessment assumes a project budget cap of \$10 million for roading and bus stop infrastructure. **The five scenarios have been assessed against the following criteria:**

<b>Faster bus journey times</b>	<i>This is the primary value proposition for customers. It also benefits the operational efficiency of the bus network by increasing the availability of buses. As well as benefits for Harbour Quays, the reduction of bus congestion will also improve Golden Mile journey times.</i>
<b>Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops</b>	<i>This is the primary risk for customers. Poor access and comfort will be a barrier to encouraging a change in long established travel routines.</i>
<b>Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network</b>	<i>The Harbour Quays significantly improves public transport to the waterfront, however seamless links to the wider bus network (Wellington Railway Station, roads leading into the north-south and east-west axis of core bus routes) need to be maintained. From a customer perspective, a 'legible' network makes journey planning easier.</i>
<b>Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus</b>	<i>As with network alignment, waterfront access will be improved however, customers will expect to retain easy access to the Golden Mile and Wellington Station. Providing a choice of services will enable this.</i>
<b>Golden Mile bus capacity</b>	<i>There is a balance between avoiding the impacts of bus congestion for customers and operations, and the impact that too few buses on the Golden Mile might have on the vitality of the area.</i>
<b>Affordability of required shelter within the budget (c.\$10m).</b>	<i>A key constraint is that the current budget limits the scale of stop infrastructure to meeting the demand of approximately 25% of current Golden Mile peak patronage at the busiest stops.</i>

Additional to these criteria, an MCA has also factored in <b>urban design criteria, including noise and emissions from buses, visual impacts of buses and pedestrian congestion.</b>	<i>The impact of large numbers of buses using a single corridor on the attractiveness of central city environment for the public needs to be considered.</i>
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### Summary of options and their assessment

<b>Option 1A: Express + Brandon St services</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing express services (30x, 31x, 32x, 38x, HX, AX)</li> <li>Peak only services stopping at Brandon St (13, 26, 33, 34, 37) become express services.</li> </ul>	
Faster bus journey times	<b>Yes: Faster peak services; Supports the 'Express' proposition</b>
Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops	<b>Yes: Budget allows for adequate shelter at stops</b>
Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus	<b>Yes: Including improved access to conference facilities and some hotels for the Airport Express (AX); Choice of Golden Mile access provided by standard services.</b>
Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network	<b>Yes: Especially current express and Brandon St services</b>
Impact on Golden Mile bus capacity	<b>19%</b> of peak patronage moved to Harbour Quays 2026: <b>81</b> maximum peak buses 2034: <b>102</b> maximum peak buses

<b>Option 1B: Express + Brandon St services + an all-day harbour-side service</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing express services (30x, 31x, 32x, 38x, HX, AX)</li> <li>Peak only services stopping at Brandon St (13, 26, 33, 34, 37) become express services.</li> <li><b>All day harbour-side service (potentially route 24 or 83)</b></li> </ul>	
Faster bus journey times	<b>Yes: Faster peak services; Supports the 'Express' proposition</b>
Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops	<b>Yes: Budget allows for adequate shelter at stops</b>
Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus	<b>Yes: Including 7 day a week all-day access to waterfront attractions and; Improved access to conference facilities and some hotels for the Airport Express (AX); <i>Choice of Golden Mile access provided by standard services, except for Eastbourne customers.</i></b>
Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network	<b>Yes: Especially current express and Brandon St services; <i>Opportunity to realign some regional services along more efficient routes (such as Aotea Quay)</i></b>
Impact on Golden Mile bus capacity	<b>23%</b> of peak patronage moved to Harbour Quays 2026: <b>76</b> maximum peak buses 2034: <b>97</b> maximum peak buses

<b>Option 2: Express + Brandon Street + Peak Only services + Regional services</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing express services (30x, 31x, 32x, 38x, HX, AX)</li> <li>Peak only services stopping at Brandon St (13, 26, 33, 34, 37) become express services</li> <li><b>All peak only (35, 36, 39, 56, 57, 58, 60e, 81, 84) and regional services (83) become express services</b></li> </ul>	
Faster bus journey times	<b>Yes:</b> Faster peak services; Supports the 'Express' proposition, <i>especially for longer 3 zone plus journeys; Eases peak Golden Mile congestion.</i>
Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops	<b>Marginal:</b> Busiest stops may struggle to shelter waiting customers with existing budget
Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus	<b>Yes: Including 7 day a week all-day access to waterfront attractions</b> and; Improved access to conference facilities and some hotels for the Airport Express (AX); choice of Golden Mile access provided by standard services.
Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network	<b>Yes:</b> Especially current express and Brandon St services; Opportunity to realign some regional services along more efficient routes (such as Aotea Quay)
Impact on Golden Mile bus capacity	<b>32%</b> of peak patronage moved to Harbour Quays 2026: <b>65</b> maximum peak buses/hour 2034: <b>81</b> maximum peak buses /hour

<b>Option 3: East-West services + Regional services</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>East-West services (2, 4, 13, 14, 24, 30x, 31x, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38x, AX)</b></li> <li>Regional services from outside Wellington City (60e, 81, 83, 84) become express services</li> </ul>	
Faster bus journey times	<b>Yes: Faster services for east-west services, most existing express services and regional services; Eases congestion on the Golden Mile for faster journeys.</b>
Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops	<b>No: Current budget does not allow for stop shelter required for patronage.</b>
Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus	<b>No: Prevents choice of direct access to the Golden Mile for east-west bus passengers.</b>
Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network	<b>Yes: Retains good connections with current east-west routes; Provides an opportunity to link to a future bus priority route to the eastern suburbs</b>
Impact on Golden Mile bus capacity	<b>60%</b> of peak patronage moved to Harbour Quays 2026: <b>55</b> maximum peak buses/hour 2034: <b>71</b> maximum peak buses/hour <b>But off-peak down to 28-36 buses/hour</b>

<b>Option 4: North-South services + Regional services</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>North-South services (1, 3, 23, 26, 52, 55, 39, 56, 57, 58, HX)</b></li> <li>• Regional services from outside Wellington City (60e, 81, 83, 84) become express services</li> <li>• Airport Express (AX)</li> </ul>	
Faster bus journey times	<b>Yes: Faster services for north-south services, most existing express services and regional services;</b> Eases congestion on the Golden Mile for faster journeys.
Customer ease of access and comfort getting to and waiting at stops	<b>No:</b> Current budget does not allow for stop shelter required for patronage.
Choice and access to destinations in the central city by bus	<b>No:</b> Prevents choice of direct access to the Golden Mile for north-south bus passengers
Alignment and connections with the wider public transport network	<b>Yes: Prevents access to Wellington Station from the Golden Mile.</b>
Impact on Golden Mile bus capacity	<b>43%</b> of peak patronage moved to Harbour Quays 2026: <b>74</b> maximum peak buses/hour 2034: <b>95</b> maximum peak buses/hour <b>But off-peak down to 29-30 buses/hour</b>

## Options Analysis

31. **The analysis supports a transitional strategy to migrate services and customers to the Harbour Quays, starting with a minimum viable option of 1B. This enables a shift to the Harbour Quays with the minimum of customer risk, within the current available budget for infrastructure.**
32. The primary proposition is faster bus journeys. This can be immediately provided by rerouting existing Express services along the Harbour Quays (Option 1A and 1B). Brandon Street terminating services would be extended along Harbour Quays and also become Express services, improving their reach into the city.
33. Beyond this, Option 2 may not provide sufficient shelter within the budget at the busiest stops, presenting a customer risk.
34. Options 3 and 4 would require a significantly greater level of bus stop shelter and investment.
35. As well as express services, there is an opportunity (subject to cost) within Option 1B to introduce one all-day, 7-day-a-week service to provide access to popular waterfront attractions.
36. Once Option 1B is established, a low risk incremental approach of introducing all peak services and regional services from outside of Wellington City (Option 2) could be introduced in a staged manner as demand increases and infrastructure investment is available.
37. In the short to medium term any move to shift one axis of the Wellington City bus network (Option 3: East-West, or Option 4: North-South) to the Harbour Quays is not viable.
38. The change would be a significant shift for customers and risk creating the perception of 'winners and losers'. It would require a level of stop shelter significantly greater than that currently budgeted for.
39. It would also lower bus volumes along the Golden Mile well below the desired level of 50 to 80 buses/hour required to maintain vitality on the GM and support the central city circulation function of the Golden Mile. However, the projected increase in bus volumes beyond 2034 may make this option both feasible and desirable in the longer term.
40. Option 3 (East-West axis) would be the best long-term solution for shifting one axis of the network to the Harbour Quays, because of its alignment with roads to the western suburbs. It also aligns with the strategy to introduce higher-capacity vehicles and ultimately establish some form of mass rapid transit through the city and to the eastern suburbs, where current modelling suggests the greatest demand for public transport services will be. It supports the legibility of the Golden Mile with all remaining buses on the Golden Mile providing direct access to Wellington Station.
41. Option 4 (North-South axis) is poorly aligned with the wider network. East-West services would occupy the Golden Mile but would not connect with Wellington Railways Station, severing a key connection. If this option was a future consideration, for instance for some form of mass rapid transit, the Wellington City bus network would need to be realigned to ensure good connections remained.