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TO	Greater Wellington Regional Council
FROM	Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
DATE	April 18, 2016
SUBJECT	Submission on the GWRC Annual Plan 2016/17

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1. Introduction

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) functions to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria University of Wellington's 22,000 students.

VUWSA currently has over 15,000 members, representing some 70% of Victoria Students. VUWSA is a democratic organisation and is run by students for students. We are committed to fair representation and work tirelessly to consult with our members on issues of campus, city and national importance.



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2. Summary of Recommendations

- 2.1** That GWRC include a commitment in the 2016/17 Annual plan to extend the current 50% Youth Fare to Tertiary Students.
- 2.2** That integrated ticketing is prioritised and moved forward to the 2016/17 annual plan.
- 2.3** That the decision to scrap trolley buses is reconsidered and further options and costings for retaining them are explored.



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3. Student Bus Fares

2.1 What's the hold up?

In 2014, GWRC voted to implement a public transport concession for tertiary students provided that Wellington City Council (WCC) and other tertiary providers helped fund it.

Despite commitments for financial contributions from both WCC and Victoria University, there have been no steps taken by GWRC to progress the implementation of the concession, and no mention of it in this Annual Plan.

GWRC's call has been answered. It should either proactively engage these other parties and come to an agreement in order to implement its decision, or take the lead and fund the much needed concession alone.

4. The Case for Fairer Fares

3.1 Financial Equity

Student poverty is rife in Wellington, and with some of New Zealand's highest public transport fares, the City is perpetuating the struggle for its students. Government cuts to student loans and allowances, combined with the rising cost of living and a lack of opportunities for employment mean that being a student in 2016 is as hard as ever.

The cost of rent alone is more than what students are allowed to borrow per week to live on. This is driving students further out into the suburbs, which in turn increases transport costs. In a recent survey, over 25% of our members reported that their travel costs had increased by at least \$20 per week as a result of having to move further from the University. Students in Porirua for example are paying \$60 per week just to get to class, which is money that must be earned on top of a full time study load.



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Cost of travel to Kelburn Campus per week from other parts of the region:

From	Train to Wellington Station	Bus to Kelburn	Total
Kapiti	\$115	\$20	\$135
Porirua	\$65	\$20	\$85
Upper Hutt	\$90	\$20	\$110
Lower Hutt	\$75	\$20	\$95

Based on the pressure on our welfare services, we know that students are relying on food parcels just so that they can afford to commute to University.

By introducing student fares, GWRC can make a huge difference to the lives of thousands people living in the Wellington region by taking some of the financial pressure off students.

3.2 It is consistent with what is offered in other cities in NZ and around the world:

Public transport fares are higher for students in Wellington than in any other New Zealand city.

Auckland offers around 40% off for fares for tertiary students, Dunedin 25%, and Christchurch’s low flat fare structure makes it very cheap for students. Palmerston North has free buses for students throughout the city.

Special arrangements for student travel on public transport exist in most cities around the world, particularly those with large Universities. Some offer discounts, and many offer completely free travel. Wellington is among a minority of cities that do not offer some sort of student discount.

3.3 Making Wellington a ‘Student Friendly City’.

Students contribute than \$2b to the Wellington economy, [and hence are a significant rating base, but lack of interest to reciprocate by offering a public transport discount indicates the Council’s failure to strengthen its position as a student friendly city (1).

A tertiary concession would help to attract both domestic and international students which would further boost the Wellington economy. By looking after students while they are studying, graduates will



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be more inclined to remain in Wellington after they graduate, and the City will get a return on its investment by holding onto talent.

3.4 Efficiency and Sustainability

Contrary to comments by Councillors in the media, a tertiary discount would greatly increase patronage of the public transport network. When asked if a 50% discount would influence the number of trips they made, 46% of students said that it would (2).

Although public transport use by students in Wellington is already high, these findings clearly indicate that it would increase. Because student study schedules vary greatly, many of these trips would be during off peak times when buses and trains are running below capacity.

Student discounts will improve the efficiency of Wellington's public transport system, and help the City move toward a clean, modern network that GWRC is aiming for.

3.5 Why students and not other low income earners?

As explained above, Student discounts as part of the fare structure for public transport are a mainstay in most New Zealand cities and others around the world.

VUWSA does not oppose discounts for other low income groups. We support the 25% off peak reduction across the board that has been proposed in the Regional Public Transport Plan, which will be of great benefit to beneficiaries and those not in paid work. This reduction must not be delayed and instead should be included in this years' annual plan.

However, the argument that a student discount would not be pursued on the basis that other groups will miss out, is contrary to the decisions made by public transport administrators in the vast majority of other cities.

VUWSA believes not that other groups do not deserve discounts, but that if the Council offer a student discount for those at high school, this should be extended to include all students. Most tertiary students



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who are paying study and living costs are in a far worse financial position than high school students, most of whom have their transport costs paid for by parents.

5. Other Issues

4.1 Integrated Ticketing Delay

An integrated ticketing system is an essential component of a modern, efficient public transport system, and is particularly important for getting the next generation into using clean transport.

Having been delayed by central Government already, it is concerning that GWRC has further delayed its implementation.

Integrated ticketing should be prioritised and included in the 2016/17 annual plan.

4.2 Keeping our Buses Clean

The allocation of additional capital funding into the Wellington City bus fleet is a positive step, however the decision to scrap the clean and iconic trolley buses in favour of diesel is a massive step backward.

Having made the decision in 2015 to swap out the trolleys for modern hybrid buses in an attempt to have a more efficient fleet, the Council has now changed direction substantially by revealing that the cost of hybrid replacements is financially out of reach, and that standard diesels will have to be purchased.

The decision not to invest in consolidated trolley bus infrastructure is short sighted, and will mean more carbon emissions and noise pollution in the Wellington CBD. It is firmly at odds with the council's climate change targets.



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6. References

1. *“City Council’s plan to help Wellington students”* – Justin Lester, Stuff 22/06/15
<http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/69535383/city-councils-plan-to-help-wellington-students>

Victoria University data shows that the University contributes \$1b directly and growing. Massey, Whitireia and Weltec exceed \$500-750m, and with the addition of Private Tertiary Institutions (PTEs), the total figure exceeds \$2b.

2. Victoria University student survey on public transport use (2012):
http://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/council-reports/Report_PDFs/2012_462_5_Attachment.pdf

7. Contact

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss submission in more detail in person. Please contact us in the event further clarification of this submission is needed, or to arrange for VUWSA to make an oral submission.

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