

Christmas 2011 Rail Network Closure

Purpose

To advise Directors on the options considered for the temporary and staged closure of the rail network over the Christmas 2011 period to facilitate network upgrade works and the rationale for the option selected.

Executive Summary

A staged rail network closure is required over the Christmas 2011 low passenger demand period to facilitate network upgrade works. Historically the closure has been for three weeks, commencing on 24 December. However, due to the extensive track works required for the proposed Parnell Station, an additional closure of the Britomart to Newmarket line is required over a total 4.5 weeks.

Two options were available, to close the Britomart to Newmarket section either on 19 – 24 December or 18 – 25 January in addition to the core period between 25 December and 18 January.

While it is a difficult decision to close part of the rail network in the week before Christmas, the decision for 19 – 24 December was taken because it affected fewer regular rail customers than the alternative, it was the lowest cost option and had the least operational risks. Negative impacts on affected customers will be mitigated through a dedicated frequent bus shuttle between Grafton / Newmarket and Britomart.

Required Network Closure

During the redevelopment of the Auckland rail network, rail closure to facilitate significant works have been limited to periods of low customer use, eg over weekends or public holidays as the priority has been to minimise disruption for existing rail customers. Recent Christmas shutdowns have been limited to three weeks, however, for 2011 a closure of the Britomart to Newmarket section of the network is required for 4.5 weeks to facilitate the rail infrastructure preparation works to allow Parnell Station construction to commence over the following 12 to 18 months. This includes a complete track replacement over part of the section.

Total works to be undertaken during the Christmas period include:

- 1) Britomart - structural reconfiguration of Britomart tunnel, to enable major track and signalling works to be completed over Summer 2012/13. Length of time required - 2 weeks
- 2) Eastern Line Bridgeworks - several bridge reconstructions to gain clearance for electrification, including AMETI works at Panmure. Length of time required - 3 weeks
- 3) EMU Depot construction - Length of time required - 3 weeks
- 4) Papakura Redevelopment - civils and drainage works. Length of time required - 3 weeks
- 5) Parnell Station - delivery of all track, signals and civils works. Major package of work required, which will enable station construction over the following 12 - 15 months. Length of time required - 4 to 4.5 weeks
- 6) AEP overhead line works - continued delivery of mast installation across the network

Commuter Impact:

The core network closure occurs between 25 December and 18 January.

The two options were considered for the Britomart to Newmarket line section closure (to facilitate Parnell infrastructure works), either on 19 – 24 December or 18 – 25 January.

It should be noted that the extra closure period does not impact on the Southern/Eastern line and thus only impacts on rail commuters north of Westfield on the Southern/Newmarket line.

During the 19 – 24 December option, it is likely to impact on a maximum of 2,850 passenger trips per day including both inbound and outbound and during the 18 – 25 January option, a maximum of 3,150 passenger trips per day including both inbound and outbound. This represents about 20% of the daily network usage. Therefore, the minimum impact on regular commuters will be pre-Christmas closure.

Customers wishing to travel through to Britomart will be accommodated by a frequent dedicated bus shuttle from Grafton for Western Line customers, utilising the Central Connector bus lanes to avoid increased traffic congestion and from Newmarket for Southern Line passengers boarding north of Westfield. Twenty buses have been procured operating an approximate 12 minute single trip.

For Southern Line passengers boarding south of Westfield, additional Southern Line services via the Eastern Line into Britomart will be provided. This improved service for the South and East pre-Christmas will benefit commuters.

Rationale for selected option:

While it was a difficult decision to close part of the rail network in the week before Christmas the decision to close Britomart to Newmarket prior to Christmas between 19 – 24 December rather than during the 3rd week of January 18 – 25 January was taken for the following reasons:

- 1) Less regular rail users are impacted.
 - a) Approximately 8.3% more customers (approximately 300 passenger trips a day and up to 2,000 passenger trips over the course of the week) would be negatively impacted under the alternative:
 - i). Historically, rail use across the network is 14,245 daily passengers for the week before Christmas and 15,426 daily passengers for the third week of January (excluding Big Day Out patronage)
 - b) Negative impacts to customers as a result of closure would be largely mitigated through provision of a frequent bus shuttle between Grafton/Newmarket and Britomart to transfer rail passengers wishing to get to Britomart
- 2) Phasing of the construction works for Parnell rail infrastructure to reduce costs.

The selected option permits specialist rail resource (signalling, track, etc.) to undertake preparatory work during normal work period prior to Christmas and then civil contractors would undertake civil works during the higher cost work period after Christmas. The alternative would require additional cost to employ more specialist rail resource to work during the higher employment cost period of the week following

Christmas. The earlier closure also assists with phasing of all other work being done during the shutdown.

- 3) Demand for public transport services to the Big Day Out on Friday 20 January 2012.
 - a) A commercial agreement exists between NZ Bus and Big Day Out for bus shuttle services from the top of Queen Street to Mt Smart. However, this service has not met public transport demand historically and a special event rail service (fare paying) has been historically operated to meet the additional demand.
 - b) Last year's event generated an additional 19,097 passenger rail journeys with planning this year for 20,000 rail trips.
 - c) Partial closures of the network in previous years have contributed to operational rail issues. As a result, public criticism has been levelled at the organisation for failing to adequately plan public transport services to support the event. Given Auckland's objective of being an event city, failing to service this event was considered undesirable. This year, AT has therefore requested that KiwiRail ensure all works are complete by the end of the shutdown on 18 January and that a full network is available.

Alternative Options Assessed for Big Day Out:

- 1) Not operate any special event rail services to Big Day Out (BDO) and leave the event organiser to arrange other options. Due to previous public criticism over the lack of planning for a major public event and the need to advise people that services were not available, this was rejected.
- 2) Provide alternative bus special event services to meet the demand – 20,000 passengers could not be accommodated by scheduled bus services on the key routes, therefore additional special event bus services would need to be provided, however, this would incur additional public subsidy cost. Further, the availability of 200 to 250 buses will be problematic given existing network demand and no train service.
- 3) Close the Newmarket to Britomart section between 18 and 25 January and operate special event rail services on the Eastern Line to join Southern Line and then reverse up to Penrose. However, this will nearly double the journey time to 34 minutes in comparison to a direct Britomart to Penrose service time of 18 minutes. Apart from public inconvenience, it will significantly reduce the service capability on all lines.
- 4) Operate a normal service with event trains.

Next Steps / Key Issues

Planning has been completed on the basis of a Britomart to Newmarket closure between 19 and 24 December rather than the alternative 18 to 25 January on the basis of:

- least impact to regular rail customers
- alternative bus shuttle services to transfer rail customers between Britomart and Grafton / Newmarket mitigating negative customer and CBD business activity impacts

- cost and resource optimisation for the construction works
- minimise operational risks for rail operations for regular rail passengers and Big Day Out passengers on 20 January and minimising train crowding and excessive journey times.

It is recognised that a closure at this time is not ideal. Considerable effort has been made to minimise impact on the rail commuters and the least impact, lowest cost options have been selected.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Auckland Transport Board receives this report.

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