

9.3 Report on Trial of North Balgowlah Shuttle Bus Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

To bring before Council the results of the twelve month trial period for the North Balgowlah shuttle bus service (trial period March 2011 to February 2012 inclusive) and to recommend a way forward.

Summary

- On 10 March 2009 Council considered a report on the feasibility of a Warringah shuttle bus service.
- As a consequence of these investigations Council entered into an arrangement with Manly Council in which Manly Council provided, for a one off fee of \$18,500, a 12 month trial of a Hop Skip and Jump Bus service between North Balgowlah and Balgowlah commercial centre.
- The trial period ends at the end Feb 2012.
- Manly Council has recently foreshadowed the possibility of extending the period of the service; the cost of which would be the same as that for the trial period.
- Over the reporting period patronage levels have been relatively low and trip costs have been relatively high.
- Manly Council requires a response to this offer before the end of February. It will cease to operate the service at the end of the trial period unless Council advises that it wishes to continue.
- If the service is to cease, Warringah Council should develop an exit strategy for its residents who currently benefit from the service.

Financial Impact

Should Council decide to extend the period of the service it must commit to payment of \$18,500 to Manly Council before the end of February 2012.

Policy Impact

At this time Council has no policy in place that would be impacted on by the extension or otherwise of this service.

RECOMMENDATION OF ACTING DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER STRATEGIC AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

That Council:

- A. Thank Manly Council for its offer to continue to provide the North Balgowlah Hop Skip and Jump Bus service for another twelve months.
 - B. Decline this offer on the basis that the service does not represent good value to the wider Warringah community due to low patronage rates.
 - C. Give further consideration to the role that shuttle bus services might play throughout the Warringah LGA after the finalisation of the Warringah Sustainable Transport Strategy.
 - D. Notify residents of North Balgowlah of the cessation of the service.
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REPORT

Background

On 10 March 2009 Council considered a report that detailed staff investigations in relation to the feasibility of running a shuttle bus service in each of the three wards to serve local shopping districts. The investigations included discussions with officers of Manly Council about including the Warringah suburb of North Balgowlah in its 'Hop Skip and Jump Bus route' (HS & J Bus). The report also included outcomes of staff discussions with STA, Forest Coach Lines, Manly Warringah and Peninsula cabs and the community.

The report concluded that should Council operate its own shuttle service in each of the wards there would be an estimated initial capital cost of \$500,000 to \$700,000 and annual operating costs of \$500,000. It also outlined various steps that would require further investigations prior to making any firm proposals in relation to the suitability or otherwise of the proposal. Given the amount of funds required to operate the service Council decided to consider the matter further in its preparation of the 2009 Strategic Community Plan.

Subsequently, Notice of Motion No 62/2009 was brought to the Council meeting on 13 October 2009 as follows.

That Council:

- A. *Seek to trial an extension of the Manly Council Hop Skip Jump bus service to the North Balgowlah area for one year;*
- B. *Approach Manly Council for an extension to the service for a minimum of three (3) runs per day;*
- C. *Seek assistance from Manly Council to fund such a service;*
- D. *Concurrently consult with the STA and Ministry of Transport regarding the implementation of a local service to North Balgowlah.*

At its meeting of 13 October 2009 Council resolved that *the matter be deferred for consideration as part of the development of the 2010 Strategic Community Plan.*

Subsequently, the action, "*Extend the existing shuttle bus service from Manly into North Balgowlah*"; was included in the Strategic Community Plan 2010 as a key initiative for Strategic Planning for 2010-2011.

Accordingly, staff of Council's Strategic Planning unit worked with relevant officers of Manly Council; undertaking detailed route investigations, trialling travel times and costing routes. The original concept proposed an extension of Manly's Balgowlah/ Seaforth HS & J run into North Balgowlah. However, these investigations reached the conclusion that the original concept was not feasible (due to difficulties in negotiating certain streets in North Balgowlah) and proposed instead the introduction of a new HS & J run, independent of Manly's existing Seaforth/ Balgowlah route.

These investigations were reported to Council meeting of 23 November 2010 at which time Council resolved as follows:

That Council endorse the proposal for a twelve month trial of a separate hop skip and jump bus route into North Balgowlah, to be provided by Manly Council, as identified at Attachment – 'Route A' and support the variation to the cost from \$18,000 to \$18,500.

The Manly HS & J Bus service connecting North Balgowlah with the Balgowlah commercial centre (and hence providing connectivity to Manly's three other HS and J Bus services) commenced operation on 1 March 2011.

Proposal for continued service

Manly Council regularly provides data on patronage to staff of Warringah's Strategic Planning unit. On 10 January 2012 an email update of patronage also included a reminder that the trial period ends in March 2012 and requesting advice as to whether Council would be seeking to extend the service past this date. If so, it was anticipated that this request may be able to be met and the cost of the continued operation would be the same as the past year, being \$18,500.00 (payable to Manly Council prior to starting a new period).

The advice from Manly Council did not specify the period over which a continued service might be available. However, as the offer seeks payment of \$18,500.00, this being the same amount as was required for the 12 month trial period, it is assumed that the extended service would be offered for a further 12 month period.

It was also advised that if Warringah Council does not wish to proceed it should plan an exit strategy as Manly Council cannot support the full cost of the service to Warringah residents.

Review of trial service

Patronage

Manly Council collects patronage data for all of its services on the basis of number of passengers per week. Patronage for the North Balgowlah run has been provided to Warringah Council throughout the trial period on this basis. At the time of preparation of this report data was available for the 10 months from March - December 2011 (44 weeks of service). See **Attachment 1** for weekly patronage data.

Over the reporting period the total patronage was 1,773 passengers. This represents average patronage of 40.29 passengers per week ($1773/44 = 40.29$) and 15 runs offered per week (660 runs offered for the reporting period).

On the basis of 3 services operating per day over a 5 day week, this represents an average of 2.68 passengers per trip ($40.29/15 = 2.68$).

The available data does not allow consideration of the demographic cohort of passengers nor does it provide understanding of the frequency of use by individuals or the number of separate users who may have used the service. However, anecdotal evidence from Manly Council operational staff suggests that many passengers are older residents and that repeat users are frequent.

Based on the 2006 census data, the suburb of North Balgowlah has 3,300 residents. 1,773 person trips represents one trip only throughout the reporting period by 53.7% of the population. However, having regard to the anecdotal evidence about repeat users, the number of individual residents using the service may be relatively small.

Sydney buses

The suburb of North Balgowlah is serviced by four Sydney Buses routes being 131, 132, 145 and 168. Of these the 132, which runs between Warringah Mall and Manly, offers the greatest level of service, operating throughout the day (half hourly in peak times and hourly throughout the day), seven days per week and public holidays.

The other services offer limited run time and frequency of service. However, they supplement the 132 in terms of peak and evening services and access to a variety of destinations.

Whilst the 132 offers a good level of service it does not achieve the same level of penetration into the suburb of North Balgowlah as is offered by the HS & J Bus.

When considered in conjunction with the Sydney Buses services and the Manly HS & J Bus service (Seaforth/ Balgowlah route), the North Balgowlah HS & J Bus provides greatest benefit to two 'pockets' within North Balgowlah; one lying north of Woodbine Street in the vicinity of Illalong Avenue, Warringah Street and Bardoo Avenue and the other lying south of Woodbine Street in the vicinity of St Paul's Road. See **Attachment 2** (Attachment Booklet) for location of bus routes.

The 132 offers only one pick up/ set down point (North Balgowlah shops), compared to the HS & J Bus which provides continuous pick up along its route. Hence, if the North Balgowlah HS & J Bus ceased to operate, some residents of the above area must walk approximately 0.5km to use the Sydney Bus service.

Costing

The total person trips of 1773 over 44 weeks represents a trip cost per passenger to Council of \$10.43. ($\$18,500 / 1773 = \10.43).

The Sydney Buses "My Bus" fare structure is as follows:

- 1-2 Sections: \$2.10
- 3-5 Sections: \$3.50, and
- 6+ Sections: \$4.50.

The trip from North Balgowlah shops to Balgowlah commercial centre is one section therefore costing \$2.10 per passenger trip.

Comments

- The weekly patronage rates over the trial period have been consistent indicating that the service is fulfilling a need for certain residents of the area. The anecdotal evidence suggests that many patrons are older people and repeat users.
- Having regard to the trip times of the service (out of peak, week day only); the anecdotal evidence about users and the route location and frequency of service of Sydney Buses, it is reasonable to conclude that the service is most beneficial to older residents living in proximity to the route whose mobility limits their access to Sydney Buses.
- The cost to Council per passenger trip is relatively high and the service is of greatest benefit to a relatively small area of Warringah residents. (Noting that some parts of North Balgowlah lie in reasonable walking distance to Sydney Buses routes and/ or the Manly HS & J Bus Seaforth/ Balgowlah route.)
- The service draws upon a relatively small population base compared to other HS & J Bus routes operated by Manly Council and the patronage rates are lower.
- There is currently no formal indication from Manly Council as to whether or not it can offer a longer term commitment to provision of the service. Should this be possible it is most likely that a future agreement will require a review of the service parameters in an attempt to lift patronage and render the service more viable. Such factors as drawing area, route locations, frequency of service and cost to Warringah Council are likely to be reviewed.
- The 12 month trial of a HS & J Bus service in North Balgowlah provides limited data. It does not provide data on which to base future decision making about the need or parameters for similar services elsewhere in Warringah. This is due to a number of factors including:
 - the service cost has been subsidised by Manly Council and;
 - patronage data does not allow demographic analysis of users or understanding of usage patterns;
 - the trial has been conducted within a relatively small drawing area with low population densities;
 - the trial area is serviced by other bus options.
- Whilst value for money is not the only criterion for consideration, it should be noted that, having regard to anecdotal evidence in relation to repeat users, the cost of the service to the wider Warringah community is potentially supporting the needs of a very small component of the population.

Sustainable transport strategy

At its meeting of 25 June 2009 Council considered Notice of Motion 37/2009 Sustainable Transport Warringah and resolved to develop a 'Sustainable Transport Strategy'. Strategic Planning is undertaking this work as part of its 2011 – 2012 Work Program and anticipates having a draft strategy for Council's consideration by June 2012.

The draft Strategy will address high level directions for transport related planning issues; support improvements to public transport and, where Council can have a role, support shift from private motor vehicle use toward alternate transport modes. The role that shuttle bus services could play in achievement of these directions will be considered, particularly in relation to areas where public transport and other alternate transport mode infrastructure is poor.

Consultation

Prior to commencement of the service Council advised residents of North Balgowlah of the commencement of the service and details of its operation. This was achieved by a mail out to all households. The advice also identified that the service would be a trial for a twelve month period.

Should Council decide not to take up Manly Council's offer, it should notify all residents of North Balgowlah of the cessation of service.

Timing

Manly Council has indicated that it will cease to operate the service at the end of February 2012 which is consistent with the terms of agreement initially entered into between the two Councils.

Hence, advice as to whether Council wishes to extend the period of service must be provided to Manly Council before the end of February. Further, if Council decides that it will not take up the offer to extend the service, notice to residents of North Balgowlah should be provided before the end of February.

Policy Impact

At this time Council has no policy in place that would be impacted on by the extension or otherwise of this service.

Financial Impact

The \$18,500 required to extend the service for March 2012 to February 2013 has not been subject of budgetary considerations because the trial arrangements entered into between the Council's did not foreshadow any option to continue the service beyond February 2012.

Hence, should Council decide to extend the period of the service till February 2103, it must find the money within its existing funds for the 2011 - 2012 year. Further, a commitment in this regard is required by Manly Council by the end of February.

Should Council anticipate that it might seek to continue the service beyond February 2013 (an option which has not been foreshadowed in the recent advice from Manly Council), it would need to resolve through its 2012 - 2013 budget process to accommodate the ongoing cost.

Group Manager Strategic Planning

Attachment Booklet - Attachment 2: Location of Bus Routes Map

Weekly patronage data

North Balgowlah - Patronage - Hop Skip and Jump Bus

Week of operation	Dates	Patronage / week (total for all runs)
1	1 st to 4 th March (4 days only - commencement on Tues)	39
2	7 th to 11 th March	48
3	14 th to 18 th March	54
4	21 st to 25 th March	47
5	28 th March to 1 st April	45
	Total March 2011	233
6	4 th to 8 th April	55
7	11 th to 15 th April	60
8	18 th to 21 st April (4 days only – Easter PH)	46
9	27 th to 29 th April (3 days only - Easter PH)	29
	Total April 2011	190
10	2 nd to 6 th May	40
11	9 th to 13 th May	34
12	16 th to 20 th May	48
13	23 rd to 27 th May	37
	Total May 2011	159
	Total 1st Quarter -	582
14	30 th May to 3 rd June	36
15	6 th to 10 th June	35
16	14 th to 17 th June (4 days only – Mon. PH)	22
17	20 th to 24 th June	44
18	27 th June to 1 st July	36
	Total June 2011	173
19	4 th to 8 th July	47
20	11 th to 15 th July	35
21	18 th to 22 nd July	26
22	25 th to 29 th July	40
	Total July	148
23	1 st to 5 th August	48
24	8 th to 12 th August	37

Weekly patronage data

25	15 th to 19 th August	43
26	22 nd to 26 th August	51
27	29 th August to 2 September	41
	Total August	220
	Total 2nd Quarter -	541
28	5 th to 9 th September	53
29	12 th to 16 th September	38
30	19 th to 23 rd September	34
31	26 th to 30 th September	40
	Total September	165
32	4 th to 7 th October (4 days only – Mon. PH)	40
33	10 th to 14 th October	38
34	17 th to 21 st October	39
35	24 th to 28 th October	35
	Total October	152
36	31 st October to 4 th November	43
37	7 th to 11 th November	39
38	14 th to 18 th November	34
39	21 st to 25 th November	24
40	28 th November to 2 nd December	43
	Total November	183
	Total 3rd Quarter	500
41	5 th to 9 th December	33
42	12 th to 16 th December	38
43	19 th to 23 rd December	50
44	28 th to 31 st December	29
	Total December	150

Location of bus routes

SEE 'ATTACHMENT BOOKLET' FOR THIS ATTACHMENT

