

Environment Waikato

Entry for New Zealand Post Process Management Award 2007

Better management of bus services to and from the superior Night Glow event at Hamilton's popular Balloons over Waikato Festival.

The need for and expected benefits of the project and how it furthers the council's vision and strategic direction.

The Night Glow event is a highlight of the annual 'Balloons over Waikato' festival in Hamilton. The event is attended by about 45,000 people, providing plenty of potential for traffic management problems.

Setting the scene...

In 2006, Environment Waikato Regional Council (which has a key passenger transport role), was asked to provide a park and ride bus service to help ease the traffic headaches associated with the event.

People were able to park at five sites around the city and take a bus to Hamilton Lake Domain. Getting the public there went fairly smoothly, but afterwards there was significant confusion about which buses people should catch to return to their site. There were no set areas to catch a bus to a specific destination, and the destination signs on the buses were not visible enough.

New initiatives

This year saw a switch of venue to Waikato University, which provided more room to split and direct crowds afterwards, and there were significant changes made to the way the park and ride system was managed to avoid confusion.

The changes by Environment Waikato included:

- two extra park and ride site locations
- easy to identify pre/post event pick up points (clear signage)
- easy identification of pick up and drop-off points along bus routes
- comprehensive briefing of drivers
- skilled volunteers to help load buses and provide the public with information.

Environment Waikato believes its careful study of the 2006 event, and the design of a new park and ride process management system, contributed to the superior success of the 2007 event. It highlighted the value of attention to detail in a post-process review, and how we applied the valuable knowledge to formulate a new process that can add real value to public enjoyment of events.

Environment Waikato's policy is to support major special events with dedicated bus services. We want events to be well attended and to run as smoothly as possible, with as few traffic congestion and parking problems as possible.

We are also keen to promote buses, generally, as a good alternative to cars in Hamilton to help ease traffic congestion, keep people moving smoothly around the city and to make our air cleaner.

By supporting the Night Glow (one of Hamilton's superior events), we believed this would promote the buses positively to a wide number of people who might otherwise have no reason to give them a go.

The process management changes we introduced in 2007 meant a much smoother post-event operation and we are confident we have established a solid blueprint for the future events, and one that may provide useful lessons for other special event transport operations.

Effective project management techniques

Environment Waikato employed a range of effective project management techniques to develop its improved 2007 Night Glow arrangements. We scoped out the whole project, then broke it down into its various components and worked on refining each.

These included:

- identifying the best park and ride sites
- confirming their suitability and availability
- planning and designing bus routes
- establishing what infrastructure was needed at park and ride sites and after-event pick-up sites
- developing information for drivers, volunteers and those managing the sites.

We also looked at event-specific marketing, fares and electronic ticketing.

We used a time line (backwards and forwards from the event) to map out exactly what had to happen when.

Meticulous attention to detail and micro-management (to ensure things happened when and how they should), proved very effective and ensured that all parties involved were completely informed and understood what was expected.



Contingency plan

A contingency plan was also included in our planning process. We identified potential problems/risks that could have occurred (road closures, postponement) and came up with practical, alternative solutions.

Our contingency plan was put to the test! The event got shifted from Saturday to Sunday (at the last minute) due to poor weather. Due to our thorough planning, effective communication and great relationships with others involved with the event, we were able to execute the task effectively.

A participatory approach to communicating with and getting "buy-in" from stakeholders associated with the project.

Environment Waikato ensured everybody affected by the project was well informed about what we planned and what was expected.

The owners/caretakers of the park and ride sites were contacted to ensure availability of sites, and site specific arrangements that needed to be made.

We worked closely with bus operators to ensure mutually agreed costs and the level/standard of service required. We approached our Environment Waikato dragon boat team to assist – a highly intelligent and motivated group, who were able to fundraise, whilst providing a very efficient service for passengers at the same time. This avoided confusion!

We liaised effectively with donor companies such as Gallaghers and Vodaphone who helped provide park and ride site infrastructure, and cellphones for staff and volunteers.

We worked closely with the event's traffic management provider over our plans. We also liaised with AgResearch (Crown Research Institute) to let buses travel through their campus, thereby bypassing congestion points. This was extremely successful.

The relationships formed during this collaborative process have strengthened the understanding and profile of the regional council and its work in passenger transport on behalf of the community.

Innovation and originality in the specific award category area.

Environment Waikato employed a wide range of innovative and original techniques to manage the process. Most of the initiatives we used were a first for Hamilton.

Park and ride sites were colour coded and the colours coordinated with the relevant post-event pick-up points. The colour of the return tickets to the park and ride sites matched the site colouring – helping passengers to find their way to the right post-event pick-up point.

We also stamped the hands of return paid passengers – this increased the boarding speed after the event.

We developed large, free-standing moveable signage for sites, and moveable special event bus stop reflective signage for easy night identification of pick-up and drop-off points along the route.

Event bus stops were strategically placed around the city, ensuring we captured all Hamilton communities. Bus routes were also strategically planned – for example, some bus routes purposely overlapped. If a bus was full, and was unable to collect more passengers, another bus intersecting this route would be able to capture the overflow.

At the north eastern end of the city we could not locate an appropriate enclosed park and ride site. So, we identified a green area that we could use as a loading zone, with passengers parking their cars on the road side. This worked extremely well.

We produced comprehensive information packs for the drivers with the clear route and bus stop and ticketing instructions to minimise confusion.

We developed comprehensive site management instructions, and wore Environment Waikato branded high visibility jackets to help people see who they should approach for information.

We ensured our website (www.busit.co.nz) had full information including fares, park and ride locations, bus route and stop locations. We also produced individual maps that were easy to read and download if people wanted to print them off.

We also provided a special city shuttle – this proved to be a useful service for existing passengers who caught the bus from home to the city, and then connected

with the shuttle at the Transport Centre. It was also a central point for people who were already in the CBD, or wanted to seek city entertainment after the event.

The city shuttle was also a great problem solver for the Campervan Association. They had pre-booked space in the Hamilton West Primary School grounds (under the assumption the event was being held again at the Lake Domain). Because the school is a number of kilometers from the university, it was going to be very difficult for them to attend the event. To help them out, we made arrangements to collect them as part of the city shuttle route. This would have been difficult to achieve if we did not have flexible plans in place to cater for these problems.

Successful results, in both financial and non-financial terms.

We were very pleased with the feedback we received over the improved arrangements.

Passengers commented that they found the park and ride sites with ease, the service was quick and easy to use, and the colour-coding of sites/tickets made a huge difference in terms of preventing pre/post-event confusion.

The improved lay-out of the park and ride sites, and pick up points, enabled large numbers of people to access transport safely and very efficiently. The use of the Environment Waikato dragon boat team to boost staffing resources provided us with an excellent source of competent volunteers, and provided fundraising benefits for the team and a win-win example of how we can maximise the talents of our own staff in such circumstances.

How was the project a "good, sensible and right thing to do."

Clearly, getting people to and from a major event, in a more efficient manner was great! It was a sensible decision to carry out this project, and it was the right thing to do – given the pre/post-event confusion that can often spoil an evening, and potentially raise after dark safety issues.

Helping to provide a more efficient park and ride service ensured traffic congestion was kept to a minimum. It also improved the public's confidence in our bus services, and will help the event run even more smoothly next year.

Marketing benefits of a well-run event bus service encourages people to use the buses more in their daily lives. This is a key strategic objective for Environment Waikato – to create a paradigm shift in peoples minds, to switch from private to public transport.

