

Submission on reorganisation of Wellington Bus Services

Robert Davies for Wilton Residents' Association¹

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1 Introduction and summary

This submission is based on a public meeting attended by about 100 members of the public, mostly Wilton Residents, and emails and phone calls from Wilton residents and research by Robert Davies.

Wilton is served by three services:

Route 14 which runs from Surrey Street in Wilton through Wadestown (Wilton service), routes 13, 22 and 23 which run from Norwich Street through Northland (Mairangi service) and route 47 which runs from Johnsonville to the City through Wilton.

Our major concerns are

- The dramatic reduction in the number of peak services on the 22/23 service,
- The cancellation of the route 13 service,
- The loss of the Gloucester Street loop for route 14,
- The termination of the Mairangi service at the Lambton Quay hub,
- A potential minor reduction in the number of peak services for Wadestown,
- The loss of late night services on Saturday night.

On the other hand, we welcome the attempt to improve the reliability of the services and are interested on the possible extension of the Mairangi service to Crofton Downs.

This report expands on these comments, makes recommendations and some other comments. An appendix gives some actual loading data for the morning services.

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2 Major concerns

2.1 The Mairangi services

2.1.1 *The current situation and what is proposed*

Currently, these run to and from the intersection of Norwich Street and Wilton Road to the City and beyond. The 22 and 23 alternate and from the Wilton residents' point of view are the same service. They go through Kelburn, past the University and along The Terrace. They are approximately half hourly during the day, better than quarter hourly during the peaks, and hourly in the evenings.

Their timing for coming home in the afternoon and in the evening peak tends to be unreliable with the occasional major hold-up on The Terrace. When this is a major holdup, the return trip into the city can also be delayed.

The number 13 bus goes via Glenmore Street makes four trips during the morning peak and three in the evening. It is not subject to hold-ups on The Terrace.

The trips logged in the appendix show that, during the morning peak at least, these buses have most seats occupied, maybe with a few passengers standing when the weather is fine and there are no other problems. But if the weather is wet or a previous trip has not eventuated the bus can be packed.

The rearrangements propose dropping the number 13 service and removing the peak services from the 22/23 service. The 22/23 service will be renamed 17 and will terminate at the Lambton Quay bus terminal, so passengers wanting to go or come from further into town will need to transfer.

Councillor Daran Ponter says the dropping of the peak services must be a mistake and we urge the council to rectify this and issue an unambiguous statement acknowledging the mistake and agreeing to fix it.

There is some unhappiness with having to transfer at the Lambton Quay terminal. This will add quite substantially to trip times for those wishing to go further into town and be difficult for those returning to time their arrivals at the hub correctly. We will address the hubbing issue separately, in section 2.4, but there is some disbelief that the appropriate facilities will be provided.

Some misgivings were expressed about not being able to get to the hospital without transferring, but it is probably unrealistic to provide this service without risking the variability in the timing that currently afflicts the 22/23 service to Mairangi.

We welcome the renaming of the 22/23 service to a single name such as 17. We hope the service will be half hourly in the later evenings, rather than hourly as at present.

There was some interest in the extension of the service to Crofton Down but also concern by older residents about not getting a seat when going into town if the bus was crowded.

2.1.2 Our recommendations

- The peak services on the 17 service be restored to the level provided by the 22/23 service.
- The route 13 service be reinstated (and go through to Courtenay Place).
- It might be a good idea to increase the number of route 13 trips at the expense of the number of route 17 trips. However, this would require examination of the loading data that we don't have access to.
- The route 17 service be extended to Crofton Downs as proposed but only if the service is sufficiently frequent to avoid overload.
- The route 17 service be extended to Courtenay place.
- The route 17 service should be half hourly after the evening peak on both weekdays and weekends.

2.2 The Wilton service via Wadestown

2.2.1 The current service and what is proposed.

The service (number 14) runs half hourly during the day, slightly better than quarter hourly in the morning peak and rather better the quarter hourly in the afternoon peak. In the morning, it is supplemented by additional services from Wadestown, referred to here as the "Wadestown extras".

It is proposed to cut back the peaks to quarter hour services and cut out the Wadestown extras.

The numbers analysis given in the appendix suggests the service will not cope in the mornings if cut back at all. We haven't done an analysis of the evening peak, but this needs to be done if any reduction of the service is to be contemplated. We have no faith that the consultants have got their numbers correct here and, in fact, it seems unlikely.

2.2.2 The Warwick/Gloucester Street loop

Currently the number 14 Wilton bus loops around Gloucester Street rather than proceeding directly along Wilton Road. This gives better access to the bus by residents in Gloucester, Hereford, Rochester, Warwick and Worcester Streets. It also has the important advantage of meaning that the outward bus doesn't have to stop in Wilton Road in places that would create a traffic hazard.

The proposal is to leave out the Gloucester Street loop. We are not sure of the rationale for this. We suspect it is not because of occasional problems in Gloucester Street, which are solvable, but rather because the consultants think people should walk further. This is fine when you are young and fit, but not when you are pushing a baby trundler, are loaded up with groceries, are frail elderly, have a gammy leg, or it is cold, windy and pouring wet (this is Wellington, not

Brisbane or Sydney). The streets are steep and the Rochester Street and Surrey Street steps are unsuitable for the elderly or for trundlers. The question of security has also been raised. While Wilton is not a particularly dangerous place some of our residents are reluctant to walk far at night and the additional distance they would have to cover would be a problem for them.

A lot of residents at our meeting and in emails were upset by this proposal.

Very few people travel from the loop to Surrey Street. Possible exceptions would be people taking children to ChildSpace at the Surrey Street terminal or from the Gloucester Street Playcentre. We suggest that if the outward bus is empty at the bottom of Warwick Street then the loop should be skipped (but check with ChildSpace and the Wilton Playcentre). The bus stop notices would need to be amended if this proposal were to proceed.

2.2.3 Our recommendations

- The Gloucester Street loop be restored (with the amendment noted in the previous paragraph).
- The peak services be restored to their current levels (pending a proper examination of the data for the afternoon peak).
- The Wadestown extra buses be restored.

2.3 The Saturday late night services

2.3.1 The current service and what is proposed.

Currently the services 14 and 22/23 services to Wilton end somewhat after 11pm. The proposal provides a leaving time for the last bus as 10 pm (from Wellington Station or Courtenay Place?). This is too early for those depending on public transport wishing to attend concerts/theatres in the central city with normal starting times of 8 pm. (And who won't want to wait till the really late buses).

2.3.2 Our recommendation

The last bus service on Saturday should be no earlier than 11pm.

2.4 Hubs

We are very unhappy with the idea of having to transfer buses at the Lambton Quay terminal – especially in the evening.

The bus from Mairangi will have to turn left at the bottom of Bowen Street and make its way to the terminal. Then passengers will have to pile out, cross the road, find the next bus going through town – never obvious at the Lambton Quay terminal, possibly competing with others doing the same thing. Going home, the problem is arranging your trip so you don't miss your bus and have to wait for the next one. It isn't such a problem at the evening peak as hopefully there will be more frequent outward services. But it would be a real problem at non-peak times. If the 13 service is restored and runs to Courtenay place, maybe the hub proposal during peak periods for the 17 makes sense.

In any case, a hub such as the Lambton Quay one, has to provide shelter, security, seating and probably sustenance. This is rather different from what we have at present. Security is particularly important at night when the number of people might be quite low.

We assume the ability to do transfers with the Snapper card will be sorted out and thoroughly tested before any hubbing goes into practice. (Council needs to bring pressure on the bus companies and Snapper to sort this out for transfers between bus companies). A protocol has to be worked out for Gold Card holders who board a bus before 3pm but have to transfer after 3pm.

3 Other matters

3.1 Matters concerning Wilton

3.1.1 Route 47

This runs hourly between Johnsonville and somewhere in town only during University sessions. The proposal is to change this to a peak only service, but run all the year. This doesn't seem to be used much by Wilton residents and we don't know where it stops. (A stop is wrongly labelled in Warwick Street – it does not do the Gloucester Street loop). So we haven't heard any feelings about the changes.

3.1.2 Route 14 and 17 timings

Currently the 22/23 service is perversely timed so you can't use it to arrive just before a lecture at the Victoria University Kelburn campus. You arrive just too late. We hope the timing of the 17 will fix this.

The 14 and 22/23 seem to run at about the same time. It would be nice if during the day they alternated so that residents who can use both would, in effect, have a 15 minute service.

3.1.3 Route 14 termination at Hataitai

The proposal is to terminate the non-Wilton end of route 14 at Hataitai rather than Kilbirnie as at present. While this is irrelevant to most Wilton residents, it did raise comment. Kilbirnie has a quite a large shopping area, the new Stadium and at a pinch you can walk to the airport. There is very little at Hataitai.

3.1.4 Smaller buses serving local routes

We note the large number of passengers getting on at some stops, for example at Warwick Street/Euston Road and Huntingdon Street on the Mairangi Route and Highland Park on the Wilton Route. We wonder whether this indicates the need for smaller buses to visit the streets served by these stops.

3.2 General Matters

3.2.1 The water-front route

We think the proposal is to send the extra peak services (i.e. services that run only during the peak) along the water-front. Regular buses like the 14 wouldn't be

affected. Do we understand this correctly? This seems a very bad idea, especially for south-bound service. Remember, this is Wellington with wind and rain and shelter is scarce on the harbour side and you would have to cross the wet and windy waterfront road where the traffic lights are necessarily slow for pedestrians. Diverting down Featherston Street might make sense.

3.2.2 The downtown congestion

Downtown congestion seems less of a problem in the morning than the evening. You get a little bit of congestion, but not much. People are getting off and not buying tickets. Traffic is less because it is limited by the restricted entry points to downtown. So the reduction in bus traffic in the morning peak is much less of a priority than in the evening peak.

3.2.3 The bus load estimates

The consultants say they got the snapper data in March and April, presumably last year. Presumably it doesn't include Gold Card data and we are not sure if it includes ticket purchases. They say they just averaged. So they won't be making proper allowance for weather. Bus patronage on both the Wilton and Mairangi services increases dramatically in the wet. See the data in the appendix. There were a couple of days with light rain in our data but we don't include any really wet days. We assume the same applies for the other suburbs. So the data is really a very poor indicator of the winter loadings.

They made mistakes with the Mairangi data. It seems likely that there were mistakes in the data for other services.

We suggest consultants' patronage data be checked very carefully by people with local knowledge before making any decisions on it.

3.2.4 The Seatoun bus

The proposal is to send the Seatoun bus down The Terrace. Given the problems that can occur in rush hour on the Terrace, this seems a very bad idea.

3.2.5 Funding

We understand the need for the ratepayer and taxpayer funding to be controlled and this was one of the constraints. The question was raised whether this funding is being increased in line with inflation or whether there has been a cut in real terms.

4 Appendix

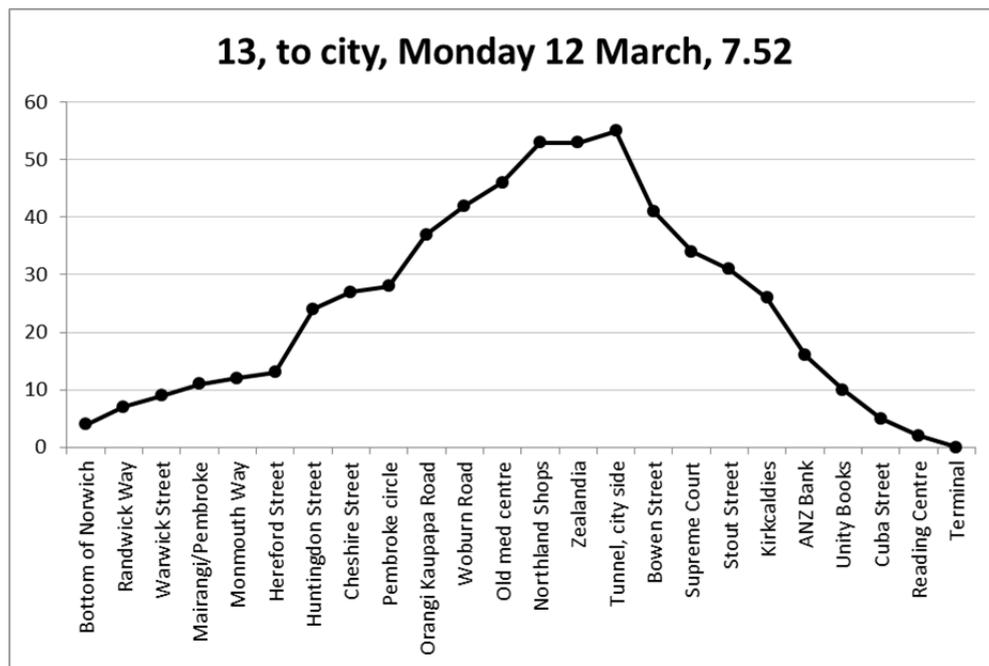
We carry millions of remote images, but there's no substitute for ground truth, the experience of a team actually on the site, finding out what's there. Michael Crichton in *Congo*.

This section presents graphs of some actual loading data from morning peak time trips into the city and for one afternoon trip from the city. The numbers include

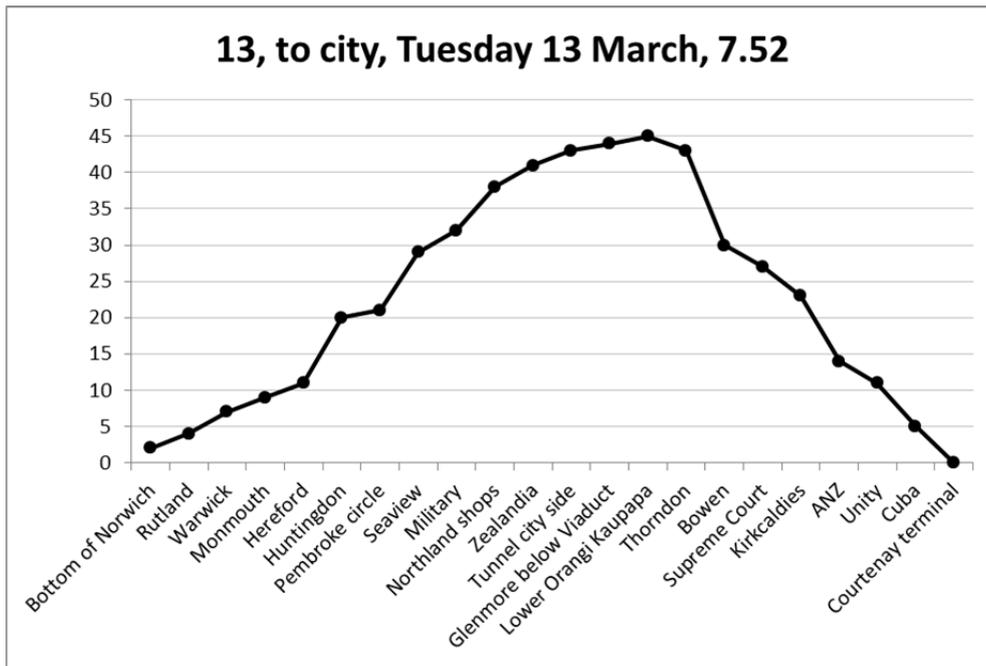
the person doing the counting but omit the driver. The counts are necessarily a little approximate when the bus had lots of people standing or where a lot of people exited. But they should be a good indication of what actually happened.

It is important to note that buses are much fuller on wet days than on dry days. In the absence of better data, assume that if a bus has people standing on a dry day there is likely to be a problem on wet days. Most of the trips in this study fell roughly into this category – packed when wet or when the previous bus was late, all seats used when dry.

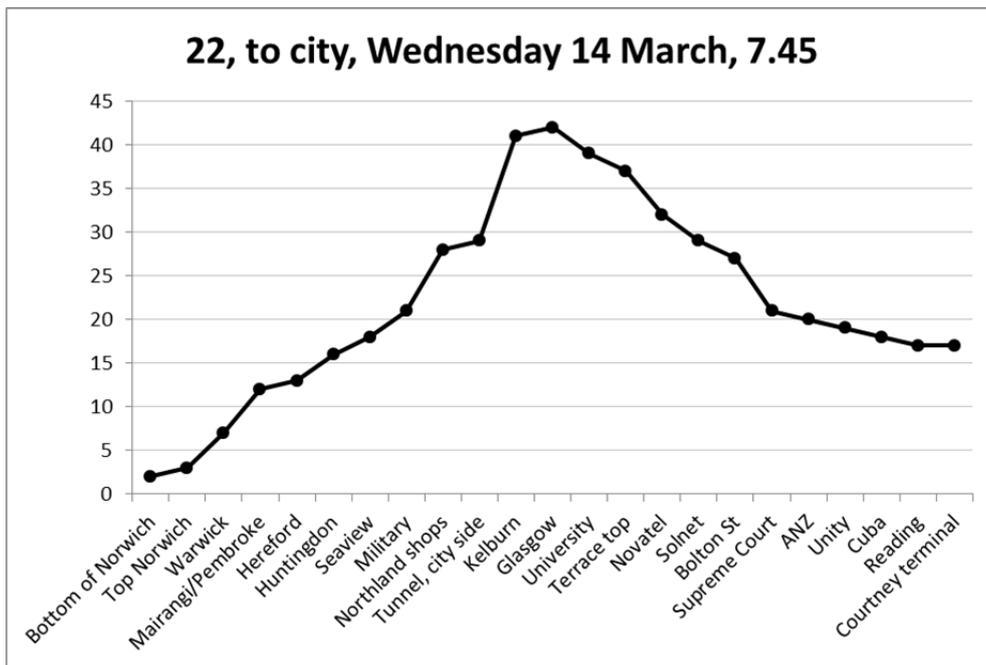
Each graph is followed by some comments.



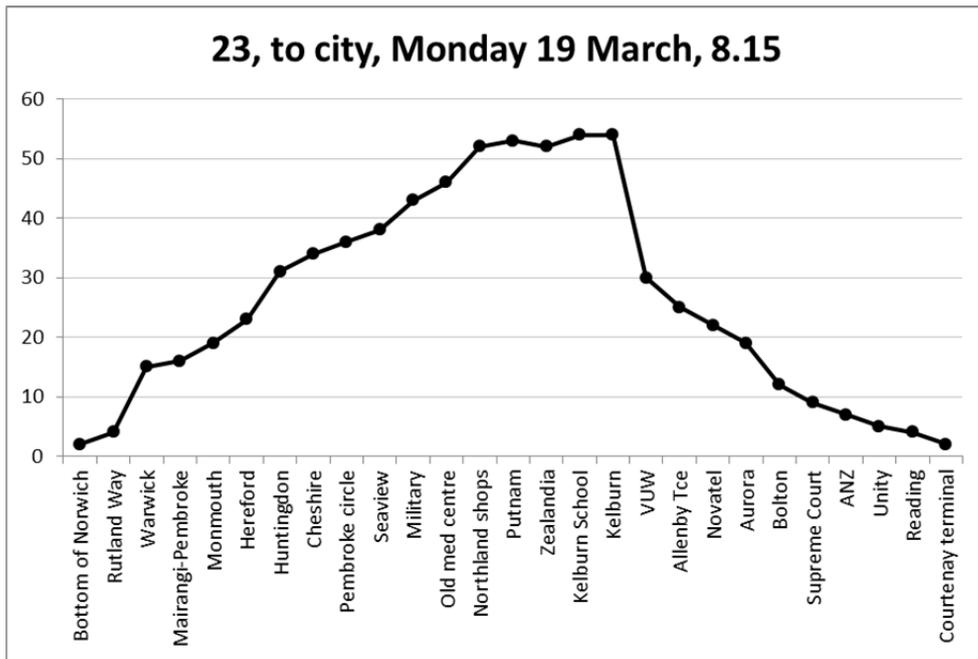
There was light rain, it was sufficient to use an umbrella. There were people standing at Woburn Road and the bus was packed at the Northland shops. I think we were not picking up passengers in Glenmore Street. A 22 had left a little before us.



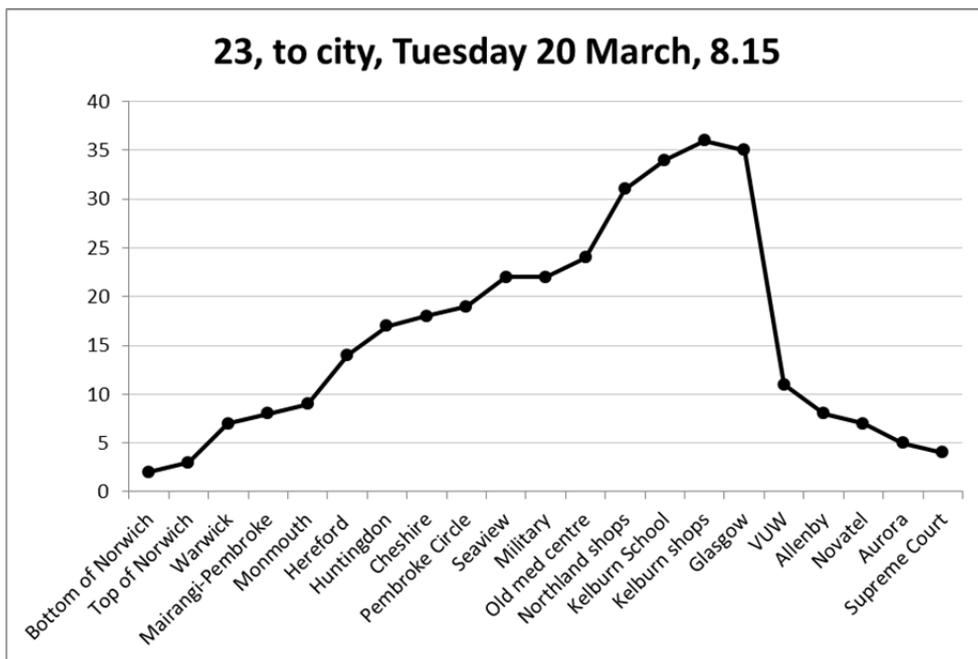
This is the same trip as the previous one. The weather was cloudy but dry. There was one person standing after the Northland shops.



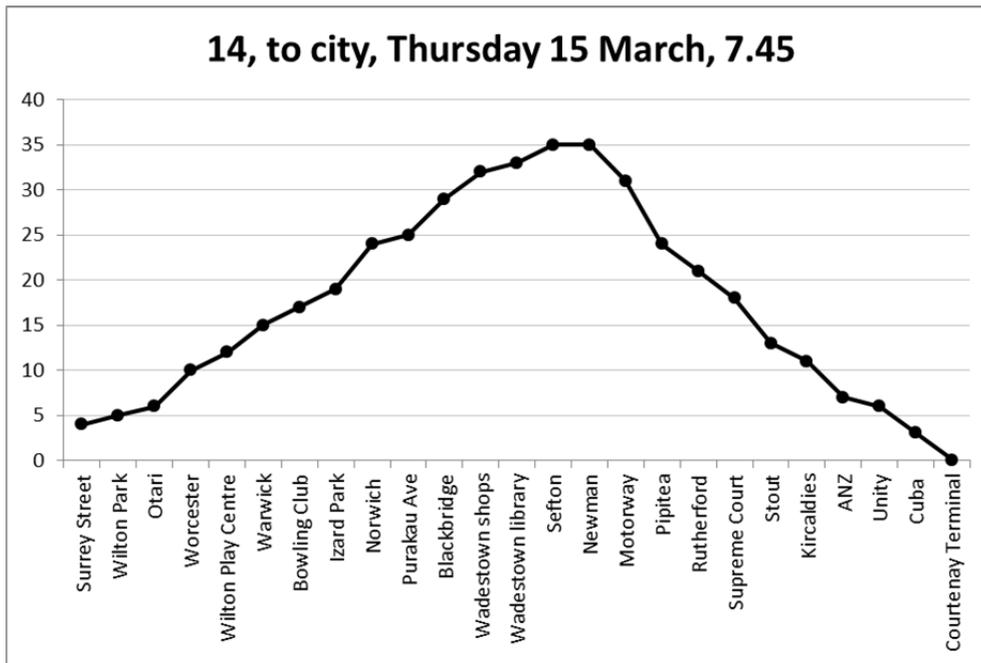
The weather was dry. Lots of school kids got on at Kelburn and almost all seats were used.



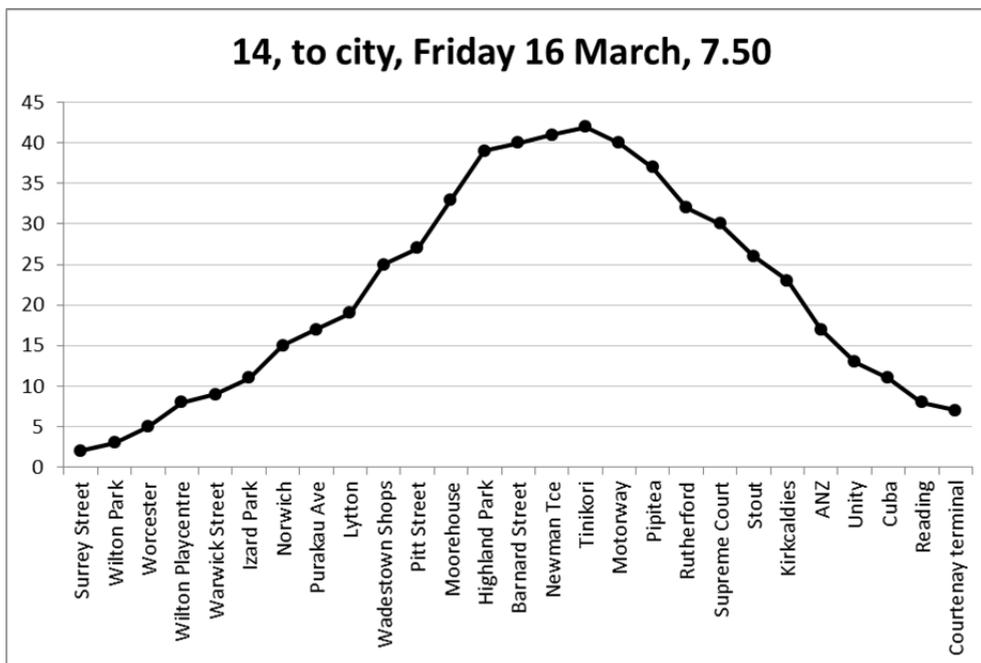
The weather was dry. I think the 13 bus that was supposed to leave a few minutes earlier had failed to arrive. The bus was packed with us skipping passengers at Kelburn.



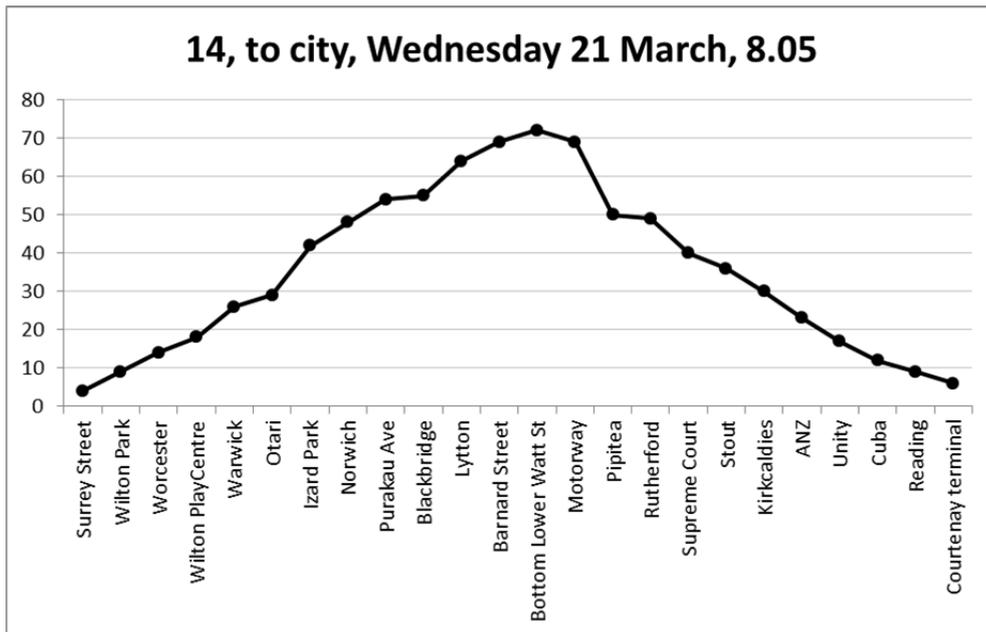
The weather was dry and windy. This was the same trip as the previous one. The 13 left just before us. There was one standing at Kelburn. The bus was almost empty when we entered the Golden mile and I abandoned it there.



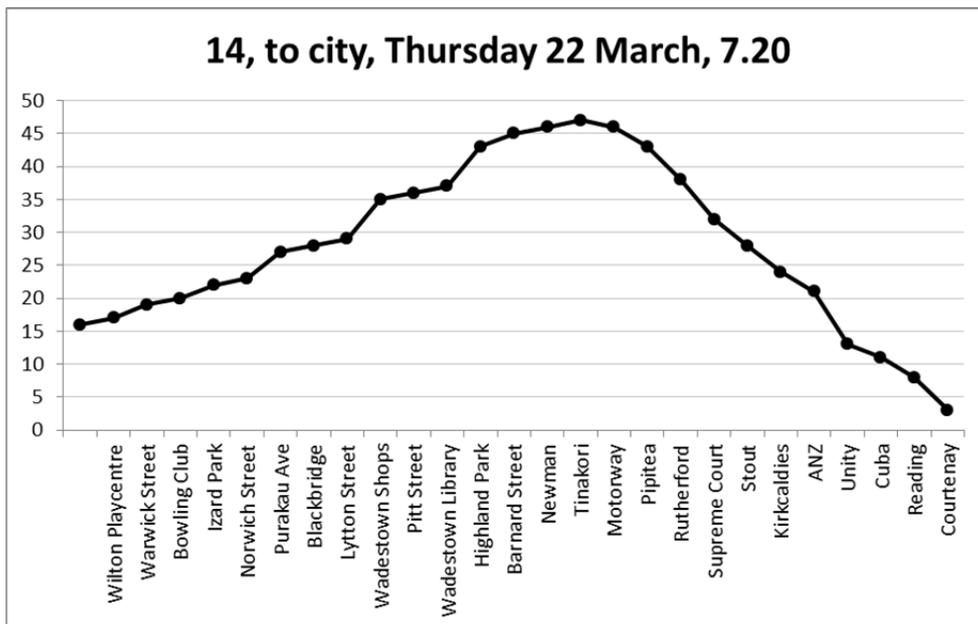
The weather was dry. Most seats were used at Sefton Street. I suspect we were following one of the Wadestown extras and there were no pickups after Sefton Street until we got to Newman Terrace.



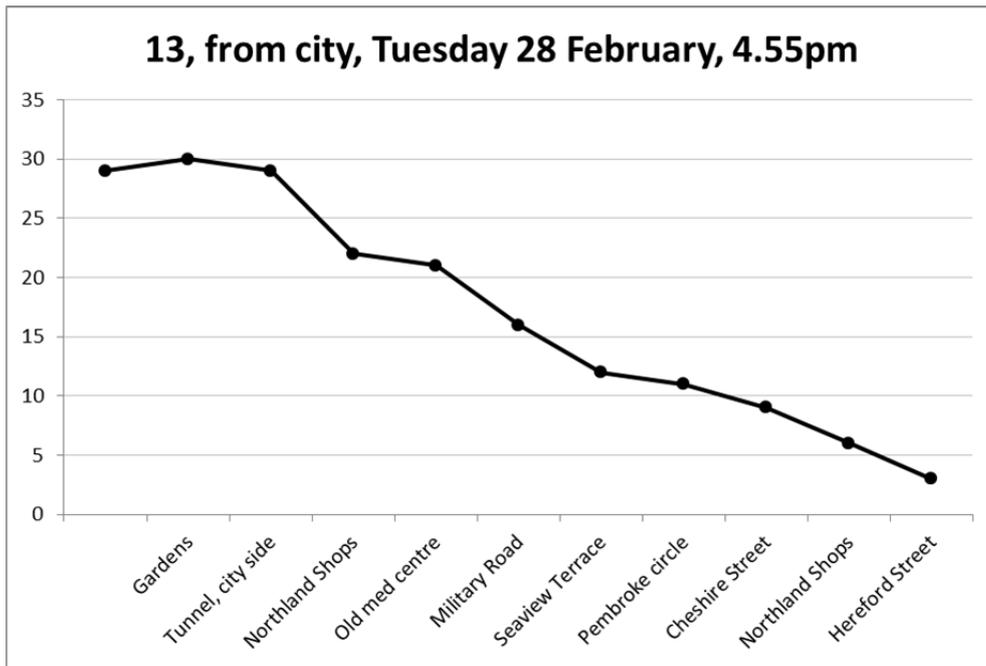
The weather was dry. This is five minutes later than the previous bus. There were people standing after Highland Park.



There was light rain and you needed a rain coat. There were people standing past Lytton Street and it was basically full at Barnard Street. We passed a Wadestown extra at Highland Park.



I boarded at the Wilton Playcentre. The weather was dry but it had been very wet overnight so I don't know whether it should be counted as wet or dry. There were people standing after Barnard Street.



This is part of an afternoon outward trip. I think it was slightly before the evening peak. I picked it up at 5.08pm. The weather was fine. Almost all seats were used when I got on.