Invercargill
CITY COUNCIL

Monday, December 2, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATTENTION: CHIEF REPORTERS
CIVIC REPORTERS

Free bus rides to celebrate Bus Smart Birthday

To mark the first birthday of Bus Smart the Invercargill City Council is giving city bus users free bus rides on Tuesday, December 3.

The Council's Senior Traffic Management Officer Eddie Cook said it had been a year since the new service was introduced and offering free bus rides for a day was an opportunity to say thanks to those who had supported the service.

"We had to make considerable changes to the service to make it more economical and cost-effective.

"The operating cost of the old service was $1.35 million annually and the new service now costs $890,000 which is a considerable saving to ratepayers," Mr Cook said.

The new service is working well and is the result of good collaboration between the Council, Invercargill Passenger Transport (IPT) and the New Zealand Transport Agency.

This has involved rebranding the buses as Bus Smart with new routes, timetables, signage, bus stops and shelters.

Mr Cook said the fare revenue was up about $110,000 on the previous year and, as result, the old service, which was previously subsidised 86 cents for every dollar of cost, was now only subsidised by 65 cents for every dollar of cost.

"We have also increased the level of efficiency and productivity of the service – the old service travelled 400,000 kms a year and the new service 300,000 kms a year."

The Windsor Comet is our most patronised of the four Bus Smart routes and the Waikiwi Link is the least patronised.

Mr Cook said the Bus Smart service was expected to carry 260,000 for the first 12 months which was down on the previous year which carried 373,000 passengers.

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“We expected there to be a reduction in patronage because we have removed the free buses which were offered during the 9am to 2.30pm period.”

Mr Cook said to encourage more people to use the buses a range of features were added – these included:

- All Bus Smart buses have free Wi Fi on board and this has been very popular with many users.
- A texting service that allows people to text a bus stop number and receive the next two estimated bus arrival times.
- Bus Smart Cards: these allow people to load credit onto their cards to pay bus fares - and to receive a 10% discount. There is a one-off $5 fee for the card. Cards can be "topped up" at the Council Aministration Building (cash or Eftpos - no credit cards) or by bus drivers (cash only).
- Holders of Super Gold Cards can travel free during off-peak hours (they will also need to hold a Bus Smart Card, but when they use it during off-peak times, no fare will be deducted from their card).
- Audible bus stop information and large flat-screen displays screens on the buses. The screens also display news, weather and information about the Bus Smart service.
- Bus Smart Central at Reading Cinemas has audible and visual announcement facilities.
- All bus stops are fitted out with Braille and raised tactile signage for visually impaired passengers.
- Low-access floors make it easy to step on and off a bus - and mean the buses are wheelchair accessible.
- Bike racks. All Bus Smart buses are fitted with an outside rack capable of holding two bicycles.

ENDS.

Photo Caption: Invercargill City Council Deputy Mayor Darren Ludlow and Invercargill Passenger Transport managing director Tony Baas cut the Bus Smart birthday cake to mark the city bus service’s first birthday. The cake was made by Invercargill pastry chef Bernadette Kean of Sweet Treats.

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