

Frustrated passengers lead revolt

Fares withheld as more breakdowns halt train services on western railway

by Mathew Dearnaley
transport reporter

Rebellious Auckland rail passengers, their patience exhausted by more delays yesterday, forced train staff to give up collecting fares.

About six passengers held an impromptu fare strike on the region's troubled western railway line after a double-headed mechanical breakdown halted morning peak-period trains between Waitakere and Henderson.

Rail operator Connex hired buses from Stagecoach to ferry passengers to Henderson, where they boarded train shuttles between there and Britomart.

But some who made their own way to Henderson after giving up waiting at stops along the way refused to pay fares once they finally found a train to catch, causing a standoff with a supervisor.

One man, who waited in vain for up to an hour at Sturgess Rd station before hitching a lift to Henderson, said the supervisor threatened to stop the train from continuing past Sunnyvale after he and the others held their ground.

But the man, who did not want to be named, said it took only a couple of minutes for the train to resume its journey and its conductors gave up collecting all fares between there and Auckland.

At least six western train services were seriously delayed or cancelled yesterday morning, as were four on the southern and eastern lines between Papakura and Auckland.

A commuter from Takapuna phoned the Herald in frustration from a train which he said picked him up 40 minutes late, at about 9.30am.

A backlog of passengers at other stations along the way meant it took another hour for him to reach Britomart while rehearsing his latest excuse for being late for work.

Connex Auckland general manager Chris White said that although a

» Train trouble

February: Passengers flee smoke-filled carriage after fire breaks out under floor just outside Britomart tunnel.

March: Concrete from ceiling of Britomart Station falls on to train roof and bounces on to platform.

May 4 and 11: Signal failures cause delays and disruption.

May 16: Two passengers faint after a foggy haze and fumes fill carriage.

May 21: Signal fault disrupts Western Line services as Prime Minister opens new Kingsland railway station.

June 2: Evening peak services disrupted by signal failures.

mechanical problem on that man's train was relatively minor, the company had difficulty moving staff caught up in the delays on the western line to its southern and eastern services.

Mr White said the trouble started when a doubled-up train capable of carrying up to 500 passengers suffered a fault in the door-opening mechanism in its rear half.

Staff uncoupled the rear unit at Waitakere for repairs, but a diesel alternator on the front half of the train failed on the way to Henderson.

"It broke down on a single track so then we had two vehicles requiring removal," Mr White said.

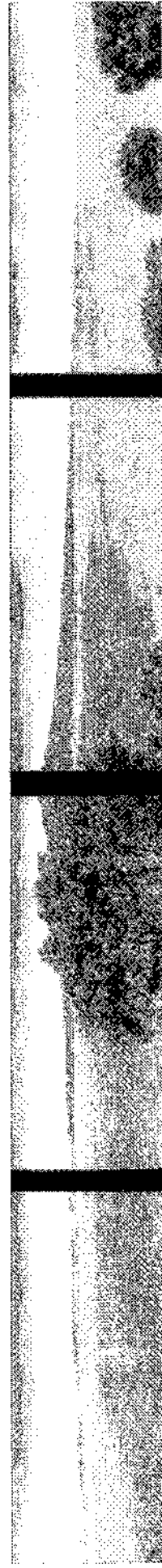
He said he had not heard about a fares revolt, but did not believe any delays to his services justified any such action.

"If you want to fly to Wellington and you are delayed by fog for two hours, do you refuse to pay for the flight?"

Mr White did not want to comment on a claim on an Auckland Regional Council internet forum that a greater use of locomotive-hauled carriage trains on the western line was making it impossible for his company to keep to advertised timetables, even without breakdowns.

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eLGAR = Libraries for a Greater Auckland
Region

- currently five partners
- potential for others

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What is Smarter Systems?

A project to undertake selection and procurement of:

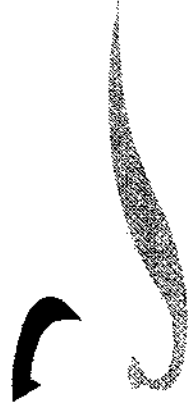
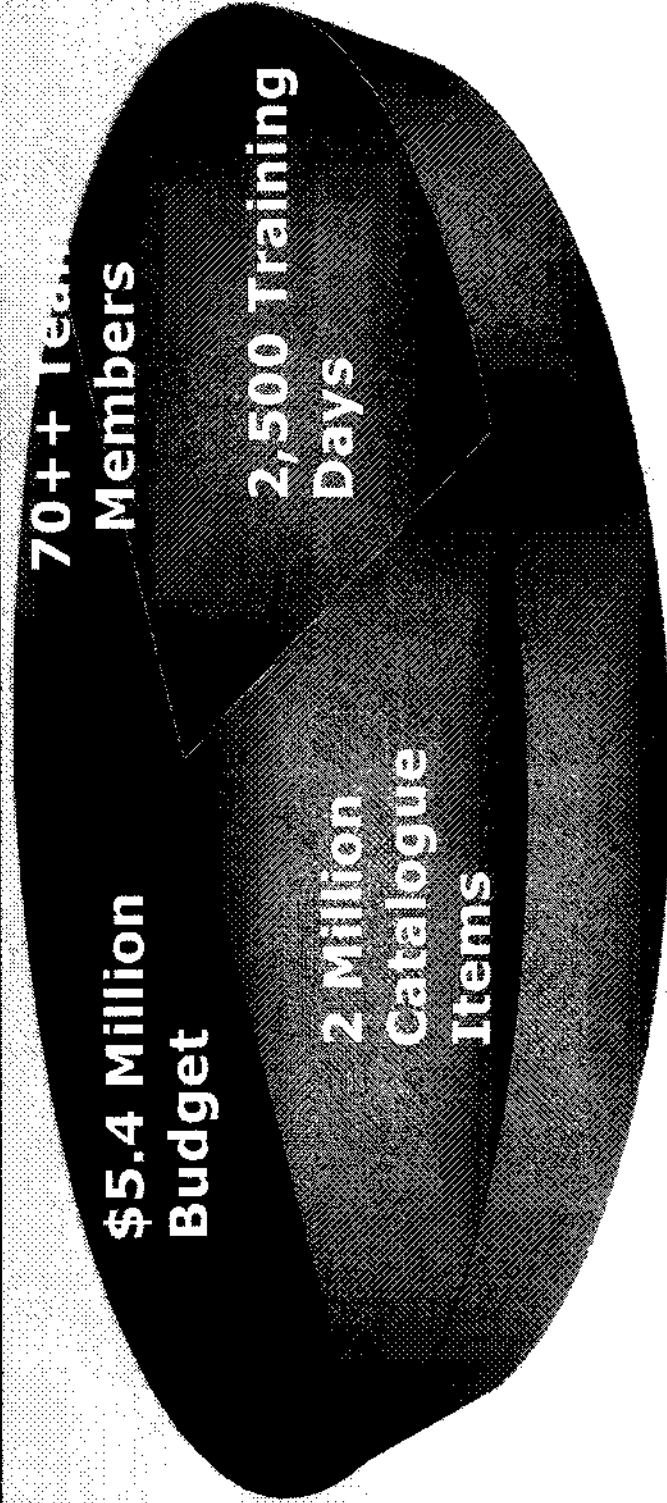
- new Library Management System (LMS) software
- platform and hosting for the software

*The software that has been selected is Innovative
Interfaces' Millennium product*

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New systems offers improvements:

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It's all about the customer...

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- Saved searches
- New items matching saved search
- Linking customers