

Media release: Rail and Maritime Transport Union

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More new Wellington trains welcomed but safety concerns remain over staff cuts

New Matangi trains for the Wellington network is great news for commuters but concerns remain over whether the Wellington track and infrastructure will remain for purpose into the future if proposed staff cuts go ahead, the rail workers union said today.

Greater Wellington Regional Council and NZTA have today announced that Rotem Hyundai will construct up to 35 more Matangi trains to replace 43 Ganz Mavag trains. This option has been chosen over refurbishment, and medium term replacement of the remaining Ganz Mavag trains with predicted long term savings and benefits.

“A full complement of the same modern train will work well for Wellington, long term, but at the same time we have KiwiRail proposing, in the very short term, to cut the numbers of Wellington track workers by over 50% and more of the same next year,” said Wayne Butson, Rail and Maritime Transport Union General Secretary.

Last month Kiwi Rail confirmed plans to cut 181 jobs from its Infrastructure & Engineering division.

Rail workers feared the impact these staff cuts would have on their ability to maintain the public’s rail infrastructure asset into the future, Wayne Butson said.

“Wellington suburban rail needed significant catch up post privatisation, this catch up continues to progress. We remain concerned about the declining track standards and condition, and moves to reduce staff increases safety risks and potential for lengthy customer disruption.”

“This order of new trains is a good example of rare rail money now available.”

“But the current KiwiRail infrastructure downsizing proposals are in direct conflict with this progress. Why is KiwiRail laying off track workers when public money is committed to improving Wellington commuter rail infrastructure, in addition to the new trains?”

Wayne Butson said that rail workers were becoming increasingly concerned in the direction KiwiRail is heading, and whether outsourcing, joint ventures or sale of rail assets remained on the cards for the SOE.

“Recently the Finance Minister expressed in the House an expected approach of KiwiRail to be *“decisive and aggressive”* – the decision to buy more new trains for Wellington was not KiwiRail’s and KiwiRail’s current aggressive approach to not be a Rail employer, along with the Ministers expectations, are flawed.”

Ends.

For further comment:

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