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Committee Secretariat
Transport and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

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Kāpiti Coast District Council Submission to the Inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand. As a district, our vision is for more people living in accessible neighbourhoods with less reliance on private vehicle use, and new developments centred on public transport, particularly passenger rail.

Currently, transport emissions contribute 57% towards our district's total emissions. The best investment to future proof reducing transport emissions, is increased mass transit options such as rail, that can move significant numbers of people per rail service and remove private vehicles from our roads. An efficient public transport network is a crucial element to support a mode shift in private transport habits and work to reduce district-wide emissions.

Public transport infrastructure is a key enabling focus for the whole of the Wellington Region to provide for the region's expected growth over the next 30 years. Wider development of housing, services and amenities will also be needed, but public transport infrastructure is the pivotal step to enabling a thriving hub that connects Wellington to rest of the lower North Island. The Wellington Regional Growth Framework has identified key areas of work including joint infrastructure planning for the western corridor, including across Kāpiti and Horowhenua to support anticipated growth; and addressing the lack of public transport provision in Ōtaki that affects access to services and opportunities for existing and future residents.

Strong investment in transport infrastructure is also key to our vision for achieving sustainable growth in our district and improving social, environmental, and economic wellbeing across all parts of our community. This submission focuses on the wider regional opportunity, as well as the unique public transport needs in Ōtaki, and the opportunity for inter-regional passenger rail services in meeting emissions reductions targets.

Our district is growing and greater investment in public transport is needed

The Kāpiti Coast is growing, and that growth is expected to continue. Our growth approach, outlined in our growth strategy 'Te tupu pai – Growing Well', is founded on a mix of intensification around rapid-transit stops and across existing urban areas (including Ōtaki) and new greenfield development, connected by very good public transport and walking and cycling networks. Increased investment in and improved frequency of public transport services is essential to deliver our growth strategy and inter-regional public transport needs to be part of the public transport offered. Indeed, timely delivery of enabling infrastructure through improved passenger rail connections would facilitate the more intense development that both our growth strategy and the Wellington Regional Growth Framework are based on.

Ōtaki is expected to experience significant population growth over the next 30 years, with new housing developments planned and already underway. Addressing existing transport needs as well as planning for future increased demand with population growth will be crucial to resolve as Ōtaki grows. There is a risk that Ōtaki will miss out on potential investment as residents and businesses will want to ensure that regular and reliable public transport options are available. Census 2018 identified that 7.6% of Ōtaki households have no access to a private car, higher than the national average of 6.6%. The lack of public transport options is particularly challenging for residents who do not have access to a private vehicle and therefore are restricted in their ability to access employment opportunities, training and education providers, and other essential services.

Strengthening the public transport options along the Western corridor from Wellington right through to Palmerston North is part of ensuring that regional spatial planning will support growth across the Wellington region. There is also future potential for spatial planning that encompasses the Lower North Island and considers both passenger and freight rail links to Whanganui, Taranaki, and further north into the Bay of Plenty. Kāpiti Coast District Council, along with 14 other councils from the lower North Island, supports the Lower North Island Rail Integrated Mobility (LNIRIM) project. The Detailed Business Case (linked in the Terms of Reference) outlines a proposed option to deliver critical passenger transport services and to increase those services as the population of the region grows. Central government investment is vital to ensure the ongoing development of that project.

In our district, the only inter-regional passenger rail service is the Capital Connection: a long-distance commuter service that operates on weekdays between Palmerston North and Wellington. It departs Palmerston North, stopping at Shannon, Levin, Ōtaki, Waikanae and Paraparaumu before travelling into Wellington. Currently there is only one outbound service in the morning and one return service in the evening. There are no services offered on weekends. The proposed service improvements in the LNIRIM project would quadruple peak services and provide an off-peak service also.

Ōtaki does not have adequate public transport and is hindered by regional boundaries

The long-term vision for Ōtaki is to develop as a district centre in the north of our district. To achieve this vision, Ōtaki needs better public transport options to improve connectivity with Levin in Horowhenua to the north, and the wider Kāpiti district and Wellington to the south.

Currently, Ōtaki does not have a full range of services and amenities and residents therefore access employment, healthcare services, retail and social services in Levin but rely on private vehicles to travel north. Older residents who no longer drive, without access to regular public transport, have difficulty in accessing the services they need. Horizons Regional Council operates a bus service from Waikanae to Levin, which is a once a day, one-direction service

that travels south in the morning and returns north in the afternoon, with a single stop in Ōtaki. Being at the northern end of our district,

Ōtaki should have equal access to services in the south of our district, but also north into Levin. Cross-boundary funding complexities should not disadvantage our community. The Council considers that the rail network from Palmerston North to Wellington should be seen as one transport 'catchment' for the purposes of planning and investment.

Electrification and double-tracking of the Kāpiti rail line to Ōtaki would allow existing metro rail services to be extended, and for Ōtaki railway station to become a rapid transit stop. Currently many Ōtaki commuters drive to the Park and Ride facilities at Waikanae Station to access metro commuter services, causing some parking and congestion issues for Waikanae residents and commuters. Extending metro services to Ōtaki would also reduce vehicle use for those commuters and allow more people from Ōtaki to use public transportation to get to locations in our district and to Wellington, outside of peak commuting times. Ōtaki would also be serviced by the Capital Connection.

Inter-regional rail and public transport more broadly will be vital in helping us meet future emission reduction targets

A Wellington Regional Emissions Reduction Target has recently been announced and the approach to public transport across the region will be a crucial part of working to meet that target. As mentioned above, transport accounts for almost 60% of our district's emissions. A stronger inter-regional passenger rail service would help encourage a shift in use from cars to public transport, but this is dependent on an efficient network that makes trains and connected bus services available, in the right place at the right time, to meet passenger needs. Currently over 50% of our workforce commute in a private vehicle or company car and 36.3% of our residents travel outside of Kāpiti for work; frequent and reliable rail services will be necessary to reduce our reliance on private vehicles.

Our district's transport footprint is linked to the expressways that have opened across our district. Improved road options encourage people to use private vehicles for their travel across and between regions. Rail services can transport large numbers of people, and every passenger rail service could remove dozens of cars from the road and reduce the associated emissions.

Sub-national targets for reducing the VKT (vehicle kilometres travelled) are expected to be set by the end of 2022, so a regional target for the Wellington Region is not yet known. The full potential of increased inter-regional passenger rail services in reducing the VKT for Kāpiti and for the Wellington Region will be explored as part of the development of VKT reduction programmes.

Future development in our district and across the country needs to encourage low-carbon living including the use of public transport. We need long-term greenfield development in the north of our district to be matched with increased rail services to support people living in accessible neighbourhoods, with less reliance on private vehicle use. We will continue our work with Horizons and Wellington Regional Councils on improving public transport options within our district, however investment is needed from central government in order to achieve a comprehensive public transport system that supports a mode shift from private vehicles and enables the emissions reductions that New Zealand is seeking.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand. We would be pleased to speak to our submission if there is an opportunity to do so.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Simpson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gary Simpson
Acting Chief Executive
Te Tumuaki Rangatira