

11 September 2023

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Submission on the Horizons Regional Council's Regional Services Review "Connecting the Dots"

Thank you for the opportunity to provide early input into Horizons Regional Services Review of public transport.

This submission covers:

- Challenges and pressures faced by Ōtaki and Te Horo communities
- Impacts limited access and connection has on the local communities wellbeing
- The ability for public transport to improve Ōtaki and Te Horo's access to services and community outcomes.

1. Public transport provides a key function connecting people and places. These networks are particularly important for rural centres where they support access to core services and opportunities for our communities.
2. We note the focus of the regional services review is looking specifically to understand the different public transport needs across rural centres over urban areas. This is a timely discussion with regards to challenges faced by the Ōtaki township and surround Te Horo area.

Situational context

3. Ōtaki sits on the boundary between the Wellington and Horizons regions. While Ōtaki sits in the Wellington Regional Council area, with its bus and train networks looking southwards, most of its core community services are based in the Manawatu area. This

means residents who need to access health, courts, police and social support services look northwards to Levin for their closest service centre, or further afield to Palmerston North for higher level services (such as hospital services). The Ministry of Social Development has recently changed Ōtaki 's administrative area from Wellington to the Manawatu area. This has further increased the need to access services to the north.

4. This dynamic creates a disconnect for Ōtaki's communities' ability to access services across the two regional areas. The lack of regular and reliable public transport connections, both north and south, means residents don't have the same level of access to services available elsewhere.

Limited current services

5. Ōtaki residents currently have few options when wanting to travel by train, with the Capital Connection service between Palmerston and Wellington the only train that services the Ōtaki railway station. This service has just one service each way per day, early in the morning and early in the evening.
6. Commuter trains from Wellington don't go as far as Ōtaki. The Metlink train service to/from Wellington runs approximately every 20 minutes but terminates at Waikanae - 16km south of Ōtaki. The only public transport option between the Waikanae railway station and Ōtaki is the local Ōtaki bus, which runs from Waikanae north to Ōtaki and back again 11 times a day, with an approximate 50 minutes between services in the morning and afternoon, and up to two hours between services in the middle of the day.
7. More recently, a bus service from Levin to Waikanae has been established to run across regional boundaries twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays – leaving Levin at 9.05am and returning from Waikanae at 3pm – taking 45 minutes.

Impacts of limited public transport options

8. The lack of local services and limited public transport in Ōtaki means there is a heavy reliance on cars.
 - Travel to work by car = 75.2% (Stats NZ, 2018 Census)
 - Travel to education by car = 57.4% (Stats NZ, 2018 Census)
9. The Housing Needs Assessment¹ undertaken in 2022 identified the lack of public transport options were compounding housing stresses and a key contributor to poor wellbeing outcomes for those who weren't able to afford private vehicle costs in the Ōtaki area.
10. The assessment also identified the reliance on a car as a barrier to employment and education in the area because of high petrol prices and limited jobs and (tertiary) education locally.
11. Unable to easily access services, people are going without support and their issues go unresolved, exacerbating the numerous challenges that people in Ōtaki face. When needing to access services north of Ōtaki there are effectively no public transport

¹ 'Not just a house, a life – Understanding housing need specific to Ōtaki', The Urban Advisory, September 2022.

options, so people either rely on cars or simply cannot access the services that they need.

12. Ōtaki has a high proportion of older residents. At the last 2018 Census, 18% of Ōtaki's population was over 70 years of age and 36% of its households live alone. This is higher than most other places across the region. Limited public transport options mean residents face increasing challenges to continue living in Ōtaki as they grow older. With limited health services available locally, and with many unable to drive to Levin or Palmerston North, people are often forced to move to places where they can better access health and other services. This forces many to move away from their support networks, with no way for them to return to visit and maintain connections back to their communities.
13. As well as residents needing access northwards, there is also need for access from Levin to Ōtaki. Ōtaki has a significant education precinct with Te Wananga Te Raukawa and a number of Kura surrounding the Ōtaki township. Recent growth pressures and accessibility issues have meant many residents, whanau and those undertaking study have needed to move to Levin, or further afield, to find housing and employment opportunities, but often require access back to Ōtaki for their study, their children's schooling, and to maintain whanau connections. A lack of options for people to move between Levin and Ōtaki impact the community, schools, and whanau from maintaining connections and support.

The qualitative needs assessment identified that:

- Ōtaki has significantly higher rates of offending per 10,000 residents when compared to the average for Kāpiti Coast District and greater Wellington¹².
- Ōtaki has the highest rates of family violence and other violent offences in the Kāpiti Coast District¹³.
- Ōtaki had the highest number of children living in poverty in 2021¹⁴.
- Total benefits paid to households living in Kāpiti Coast District increased by \$312 million (or 38%) between 2007 and 2021. Ōtaki had the highest average benefits paid per household¹⁵.
- Compared to Kāpiti Coast District as a proportion of total benefits paid, Ōtaki households had a higher proportion of single-parent benefits, job seeker, and family tax credits¹⁶.
- Ōtaki had the highest rates of hospital admissions for diseases and disorders of the ear, nose, mouth, throat, and respiratory system¹⁷.

¹²Mitchell & Glaudel p. 131 | ¹³Ibid. | ¹⁴Ibid. p. 124 | ¹⁵Ibid. p. 133 | ¹⁶Ibid. p. 135 | ¹⁷Ibid. p. 136

Recognising the gap

14. Given its importance to community wellbeing and outcomes, improving public transport connections in and across Ōtaki and the district is a significant issue identified in Kāpiti Coast District Council's Te Tupu Pai Growing Well Growth Strategy, Sustainable Transport Strategy 2022, Housing Strategy 2022, Economic Development Strategy 2020 and the Workforce Development Plan 2022. These all identify the lack of a connection north being a significant issue.

15. We acknowledge the recent work of Horizons and Wellington Regional Councils to work collaboratively on options to increase services supporting better connections across the Kāpiti and Horowhenua area. This includes work to support the Capital Connection, future increases of rolling rail stock and services between Palmerston and Wellington, and the current bus service.
16. But it is not enough. These services don't address the current and growing community needs. They also fall short of providing certainty for how medium to long-term transport services can help enable, influence, and support sustainable growth in the area. There is also a need to improve connections across existing areas ahead of the additional rail services commencing, otherwise they will not realise their full potential.

Growth is further increasing the needs for public transport

17. In addition to challenges for current residents, Ōtaki is experiencing significant growth, with the expressway improving accessibility and increasing demand for housing and business land in the area. This means more families and residents needing to get around and more workers looking to get to employment locally or needing access to Ōtaki for work or from Ōtaki to other nearby centres.
18. This growth is also being experienced in the Horowhenua District, with a significant proportion of regional growth forecast along the Northern Growth Corridor over the next 30 years. This has increased the need to coordinate growth and connection across this area, but also to other centres along the corridor – from Palmerston North to Wellington.
19. Improved public transport is key to supporting better connection to both housing and employment opportunities as Ōtaki grows. This needs to provide for both connections within and across and outside of the area. A key part of the future growth aspirations for the district is to achieve better carbon and low emissions outcomes. Provision of more efficient and lower emission public transport options needs to be at the heart of our thinking and planning, helping the district to grow well and more sustainably, over continuing on historic based car-based communities.

Te Horo has similar challenges

20. Te Horo is located between Ōtaki and Waikanae and suffers from similar challenges in the availability of regular options and services to connect and access services in Waikanae, Paraparaumu, and Wellington. Opportunities to address connections issues across the Waikanae to Levin area have the potential to also help achieve better outcomes across the Te Horo area.

Working together to explore short and longer-term options

21. Horowhenua and Kāpiti Coast District Councils are currently undertaking work to identify the current and future needs of our districts, as part of achieving sustainable growth for the Kāpiti – Horowhenua area.

22. The specific challenges facing Ōtaki also present an opportunity for collaborative work to address its needs and is recognised as one of seven Priority Development Areas (formerly known as Complex Development Opportunities), under the Wellington Regional Growth Framework. The project is focussed on working with central government agencies, regional and local councils, iwi and the local community to coordinate planning and investment to provide the right housing, infrastructure and services to support mana whenua and the local community's needs.
23. While recognising challenges in balancing the costs and efficiencies of providing public transport services across rural centres, we also recognise the collective responsibility of agencies to provide access to services to meet our communities needs, particularly to ensure equity for the most vulnerable citizens and groups.
24. We also understand that recent changes to the Land Transport Amendment Act will remove previous impediments around planning and funding for interregional transport solutions, which could support a sub-regional approach across the Kāpiti – Horowhenua area. We believe this could create better opportunities for both Kapiti and Horowhenua District residents.
25. We would like to discuss opportunities around creating more consistency in how public transport can help improve access to services for the Ōtaki area, as currently less services and funding support appears to be available in comparison to other areas. As input to your service review, we would like to explore:
- Extending existing transport arrangements or support for connectivity across regional boundaries to address these gaps, and potential for shared services across transport agencies to enable access to transport services that meets our community's need.
 - Other opportunities for on-demand services or community supported services – which have also been identified as a potential mechanism to meet current needs in Ōtaki.
26. As a local council, our aim is to facilitate and connect key 'players' in our community ecosystem to improve access, availability and affordability of services across the Ōtaki and Kāpiti-Horowhenua area now and into the longer-term. We are already progressing work with community groups including schools, NGO social and health providers, and Education; Social Development; Housing; and Health, to identify the wellbeing issues and challenges that need collective action to be addressed. As mentioned earlier, lack of regular transport is a repetitive theme of concern. We would welcome extending the work we already have underway with the Horowhenua District Council and Ngā Hapu o Ōtaki, with Horizons Regional Council; Wellington Regional Council; and Waka Kotahi to identify options to address these concerns and improve public transport opportunities.

In summary

27. Both Ōtaki and Te Horo currently have poor public transport connections limiting their communities access to core services. This need is only increasing as growth occurs across the Kāpiti and Horowhenua areas, exacerbating issues of access to services.
28. The Regional Services Review provides an opportunity for government agencies, regional and local councils, Ngā hapū o Ōtaki and the local communities to work together

to identify shared public transport solutions across regional boundaries to help address these needs – over the short, medium, and longer-term.

29. We look forward to further engagement to help understand and address needs across the Ōtaki/Te Horo and Kāpiti/Horowhenua areas.

This submission is also supported by the Chairs of the Ōtaki and Waikanae Community Boards.

CC: Greater Wellington Regional Council, Horowhenua District Council, and Ngā Hapū o Ōtaki

Yours sincerely



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