

Thursday, May 1, 2025

## Draft Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 Feedback form

Unique ID

RPTP-0464

### Contact details

Name:

Eve O'Brien

Organisation (if applicable):

Central Otago Friendship Network

Do you wish to speak to your submission at a public hearing?

Yes

### Topic 1: Are we focusing on the right things in the plan?

Do you agree that these focus areas capture Otago's public transport priorities?

Yes

Tell us more:

I support the need to ensure transport solutions for those experiencing transport-disadvantage in rural areas and smaller towns. In particular the numbers of elderly people living in Central Otago are projected to grow in the future and so it is important to plan ahead to ensure this demographic have access to adequate transport for essential day to day life such as grocery shopping, medical care and social activities. At present, the lack of public transport creates significant anxiety for older people who know they are close to losing their driving license. I'd also like to see an emphasis on making sure services across the transport network operate well for those experiencing disability and that fares remain affordable and accessible to all members of the community. At present wheelchair accessible transport options are severely limited in Central Otago so this should be a priority when planning to future improvements to the transport network. This includes not only vehicles which are wheelchair accessible but also the infrastructure such as bus stops, curbing ect. around places where people need to travel or congregate to access public transport needs to be wheelchair friendly. Provision of a Total Mobility service in the Alexandra area would be a great start to achieving this goal of equitable access to transport.

### Topic 2: Should we support community transport services in smaller towns and rural areas?

**Our proposal:** we are considering the establishment of a subsidised community transport programme providing support for transport services in Otago's smaller towns and rural areas.

**What do you think about this proposal?**

**Do you agree with ORC having a role in supporting community transport services?**

Yes

**Are there other initiatives or programmes that you think Council should be considering?**

Yes

**Tell us more:**

There are a number of community organisations already doing what they can in Alexandra and Cromwell areas by providing limited volunteer driver services on a shoestring budget. Through the conversations I've encouraged over the last 6 - 8 months around public transport in Central Otago, we've heard that there are also other organisations and individuals willing to be part of improving solutions within their limited means. This could include partnerships between volunteer-led organisations and local transport companies. For example, we have lots of bike tour shuttle companies in Alexandra and Cromwell areas that potentially have vans sitting vacant or with little use over winter season which could be part of a creative solution to community public transport. With more dedicated funding for community transport solutions and support from council staff to explore best practice and learn from what has worked in other parts of the country we feel that much progress could be made in filling some of the most desperate gaps for our transport-disadvantaged populations in a way that is cost effective and community-led. In the past community owned vans have not been sustainable as funding for maintenance and upkeep has been limited. Often it's easy to get funding to purchase an asset but not for ongoing costs. This is an area ORC could be looking to provide support as well as planning/transport expertise to suggest solutions that are a good fit for the community context and that make use the volunteers and organisations already operating in our region.

## Topic 3: Should we increase our passenger fares?

**Our proposal:** we are considering increasing the base fare for adult Bee Card passengers from \$2 to \$2.50. This would effectively increase bus fares for all passengers using Bee Cards by 25%.

**What do you think about this proposal?**

**Should Council increase the adult Bee Card fare?**

Yes

**Tell us more:**

I think that it is important to balance the affordability with the need to keep the transport sustainable in the long term. So I'm not opposed to reasonable increases in fares. However, I also encourage ORC to consider the savings to the community in other areas through increased uptake in public transport such as less cars on the road which could include factors such as less pollution, better air quality, safer roads, less pressure on parking in inner city areas and less maintenance required for roading assets. I lived in Dunedin for 7 years but had never used public transport until it was free or very low cost after Covid. This was the trigger for me to try public transport as the barrier to entry or trying new modes of transport was very low. I knew quite a few people who started using public transport at that same time for similar reasons. These are all people who would have previously been driving solo on busy roads during peak times that are now using public transport instead. So I encourage ORC to consider the wider savings of public transport use.

## Topic 4: Should we charge more for longer trips?

**Our proposal:** we are considering introducing a zone fare system to our bus networks in Dunedin and Queenstown. Under this system, passengers travelling further distances across multiple zones will pay a higher fare than those travelling short distances within one zone.

**What do you think about this proposal?**

**Should Council charge more for longer trips?**

No

**Tell us more:**

In principle I support the idea of spreading the cost of fares more fairly across users but I think that keeping things simple with a flat fare will encourage more people to use public transport. As mentioned in my comment above, I feel that it is important to consider the wider savings such as lessening environmental impact of high traffic volumes and encouraging greater participation in community life for those experiencing transport disadvantage rather than just asking 'does this bus network pay for itself'. I think that having a complicated system of fares discourages people from using the network and presents a barrier to entry.

## Topic 5: Should we keep our free fares for children (5-12 years)?

**Our proposal:**

- A. Retain free fares (100% discount) for children (5-12 years), **AND**
- B. Standardise our concession discount for youth (13-18 years) to 40% across both the Dunedin and Queenstown networks. For example, if the adult fare is \$2, youth pay \$1.20, or if the adult fare is \$2.50, youth pay \$1.50.

**What do you think about this proposal?**

**Should Council retain free fares (100% discount) for children (5-12 years)?**

Yes

**Should Council standardise our concession discount for youth (13-18 years) to 40% across both the Dunedin and Queenstown networks?**

Yes

## Any other comments?

**Let us know if you have any other comments or ideas on the topics discussed in the Draft Regional Public Transport Plan.**

While it's great that ORC are looking into community transport solutions, I also think that as our populations grows volunteer-based services cannot bear the full load of public transport needs in our region. Volunteer taxis and community vans do not generally solve the problem of affordable transport for

commuters or offer effective long term solutions for regional transport between towns. I ask that ORC fund a feasibility study into a regional public transport connection from Alexandra through to Queenstown with stops in Clyde and Cromwell (including hospitals and the Queenstown airport). Later if the proposed route is sustainable, a similar service could include Roxburgh, Omakau and Ranfurly in the future.

Ideally, this would run twice a day at appropriate times so it can be a viable alternative for those working across the region. This would support not only social connection and community participation but also open job opportunities for those who do not drive or who cannot afford the expense of longer regional commutes due to rising fuel costs and motor vehicle costs including insurance. This in turn will support local businesses to have access to a greater pool of potential employees and customers. It would also bolster our region as a destination for tourists who may be looking for other transport options.



Central Otago Friendship Network  
14-20 Centennial Avenue  
C/o Community House  
ALEXANDRA 9320

1 May 2025

To Otago Regional Council,

As the coordinator of the Central Otago Friendship Network (COFN), I wish to raise the issue of the lack of public transport in the Central Otago region with you and highlight how this lack affects some of the most vulnerable people in our community. On behalf of COFN and the 56 people we currently support who are affected by a lack of public transport, I outline these concerns as part of our submission on the Draft Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035.

Our charitable trust works in the social services sector with a particular focus on supporting and enabling people who are isolated or at risk of isolation, by helping them to overcome barriers and find solutions to enable them to connect socially and participate more actively in community life. A significant barrier that is common among our members and contributes to experiences of isolation for those experiencing disability, age related conditions or financial challenges, is the lack of public transport in the region.

By way of example, a group that is overrepresented by the effects of the lack of public transport are the over 65 age group, who due to their age tend to drive less. Recent population growth data modelling released by CODC shows this age group is only going to increase in number in Central Otago in the coming years. Individuals experiencing disability are also another core group that we see regularly feeling the impact of transport-disadvantage. Through our services we have regular contact with over 56 individuals who are either currently unable to drive or face the prospect of losing their license in the next few years. Once people lose their license here in Central Otago, often their ability to maintain social connections and participate in community life is severely diminished and this in turn impacts their physical and mental health outcomes. Even the thought of losing one's license contributes to ongoing significant anxiety for many elderly people as they have real concerns about how they will manage without driving a personal car. We hear these concerns regularly from the people we support.

Of the limited public transport options, taxi services are largely limited to volunteer driver services in Cromwell and Alexandra that only operate across a very small geographic area and at very limited times of the day on limited days of the week. And barring the Intercity Bus which comes in the middle of the day and is often operating at capacity, there are no other viable public transport options.

This issue affects not just members of our Network, but also people serviced by organisations across the social service, health and disability support sectors in Central Otago. As part of our advocacy work for removal of barriers to social connection, we have been encouraging community conversation about the issue of public transport including conducting a small survey to get more detailed feedback on local public transport needs among the most transport-disadvantaged people from a range of professionals in the social services, health and disability sectors. Please see the attached survey feedback for a range of perspectives into the real world impacts of the lack of public transport in Central Otago.

In particular, I highlight that 50% of respondents to our survey mention lack of access to public transport prevents people from accessing essential services such as medical care. I can support these reports and have personally heard anecdotes of people hitchhiking to and from medical appointments such as chemotherapy because they have no family or friends able to transport them. Other examples include frail elderly people having to travel all the way to Dunedin and back on the health shuttle (a massively tiring 10 hour day for those with poor health) for appointments or health services that could have been carried out at the much closer Queenstown medical facilities had they had access to transport for this connection.

For these reasons, we encourage ORC to work on developing long-term solutions to this issue. We realise that it won't happen overnight and that in the current financial climate funding is tight but we urge the ORC to commit to a solid plan for solving the current transport deficit in our region. We fully support the ORC proposed plan to prioritise the establishment of a Total Mobility provider in the Alexandra area as well as providing funding and support to community transport solutions. There are a number of community organisations already doing what they can in this space by providing limited volunteer driver services on a shoestring budget. There are other organisations willing to be part of improving solutions within their limited means. Our organisation is already encouraging communication and networking between these parties. With more dedicated funding for community transport solutions and support from council staff to explore best practice and learn from what has worked in other parts of the country we feel that much progress could be made in filling some of the most desperate gaps for our transport-disadvantaged populations in a way that is cost effective and community-led.

However, we also recognise that as our populations grows volunteer-based services cannot bear the full load of public transport needs in our region. Services such as localised volunteer taxis and community vans do not solve the problem of low cost transport for commuters or offer effective long term solutions for regional transport between towns. With this in mind we ask ORC to commit to funding a feasibility study into a regional public transport connection from Alexandra through to Queenstown with stops in Clyde and Cromwell (including hospitals and the Queenstown airport). Later if the proposed route is sustainable, we would hope that a similar service could include Roxburgh, Omakau and Ranfurly in the future.

Ideally, this would run twice a day at appropriate times so it can be a viable alternative for those working across the region. This would support not only social connection and community participation but also open job opportunities for those who do not drive or who cannot afford the expense of longer regional commutes due to rising fuel costs and motor vehicle costs including insurance. This in turn will support local businesses to have access to a greater pool of potential employees and customers. It would also bolster our region as a destination for tourists who may be looking for other transport options.

Finally, by providing an alternative to individuals commuting in separate cars this would improve environmental outcomes by lowering emissions by having fewer cars on the road, it will reduce the load on our already at capacity single lane roads, which in turn will help make our roads safer, especially in winter when some of our roads hardly see the sun so become iced and dangerous.

To conclude, we believe this is a significant issue that is not only affecting our community right now but will continue to affect our community as our population, and the number of visitors to our region, increases. We trust that the ORC will take this issue seriously and allocate the resources needed to invest in Total Mobility provision, community transport solutions and a feasibility study for regional transport and to ultimately start working towards finding practical solutions to our region's abysmal public transport options.

Yours sincerely,

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Central Otago Friendship Network Coordinator

# Public Transport Issues and Solutions in Central Otago

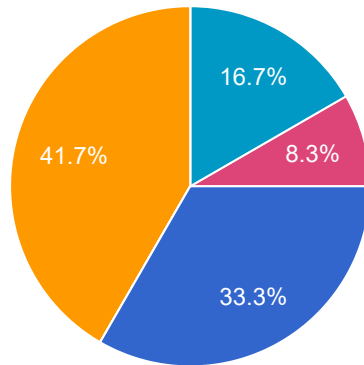
12 responses

[Publish analytics](#)

What community sector do you work in?

 [Copy](#)

12 responses



- Health
- Education
- Social Services
- Aged Care
- Local Government
- Disability Support
- Parent of a teenager with a disability



## What are the main issues/challenges you hear about or see regarding public transport in Central Otago?

12 responses

isolated/vulnerable communities with difficulties accessing essential services for health (grocery shopping, bank, etc.) and attending medical appointments.

Elderly people not being able to access transport to go to the supermarket or people with accessibility issues not being able to get appropriate transport.

being able to attend medical appointments at Dunstan Hospital, attend allied health appointments in the community. Attending medical appointments In Dunedin where it is not appropriate or feasible to use the Health Shuttle

People with mobility issues being unable to use total mobility cards in area as there is no provider. This results in inability to get to services or to simply get out and about - a primary contributor to isolation.

People who are unable to drive outside of their comfort zone - say to Queenstown have very limited options current bus service times does not allow for a day trip.

People under immense stress arranging transport to medical appointments. Health shuttle is great but does not meet all the needs.

Lack of services vies for people who are ill to get to appointments at hospitals Clyde and Dunedin

There is no public transport

At this point here is NO public transport available to use. Living in Bannockburn we travel to appointments and activities specifically for disability to Alexandra, Queenstown and Wanaka.

Not being able to get to appointments in Alexandra from Cromwell or to Dunstan Hospital. Although we run a volunteer driving service it would be good to have a regular service between centres.

Huge financial impact in travelling to Dunedin for the majority of appointments, relying on family who also may need to take time off work, Health shuttle full and also unable to take people with mobility issues or children. Timing does not fit with many appointments so may need to travel the evening before. We have some volunteer drivers but majority of these are elderly and travelling to Dunedin in one day too much of an ask.

Lack of buses between towns eg Wanaka, Queenstown & Cromwell

Lack of public wheelchair accessible transport, no taxi service outside volunteer hours

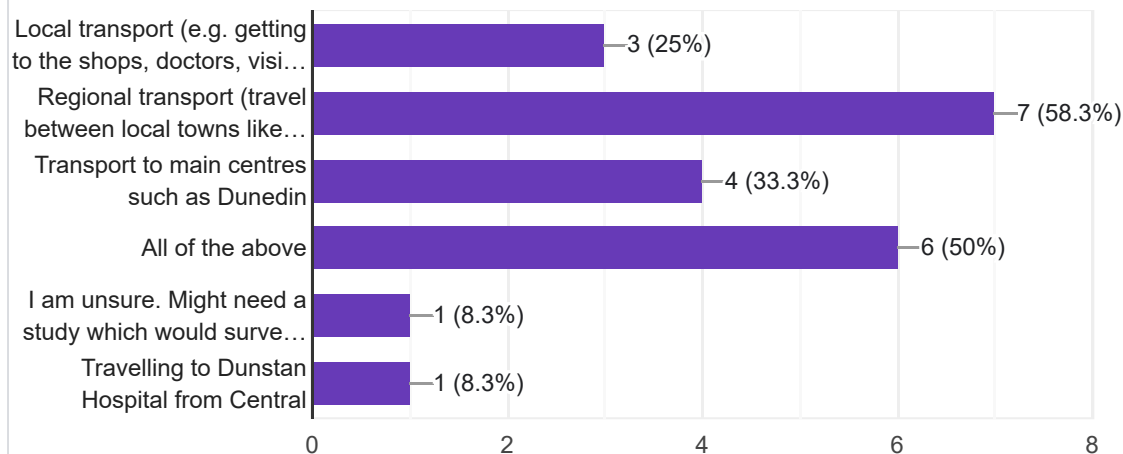
INABILITY TO BE ABLE TO GET TO PLACES WHEN NEEDED - MANY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE VOLUNTEER SERVICE AVAILABLE BUT ALSO SOMETIMES THAT OPTION ISN'T AN OPTION.



## What is the biggest area of need?

 Copy

12 responses



## What transport solutions are people who do not drive currently using in day to day life?

12 responses

Unsure.

Taxis mainly, some with total mobility cards.

relying on family members, Neighbours or volunteer driver via social services

Volunteer Driver Scheme, Friends and Family if available, health shuttle, Big Red and Shuttle +, Intercity Bus

Relying on family who need to take time off work because the shuttle to Dunedin hospital will not take children

Community Advice Network.

Our son relies on his parents to get him to his appointments and activities otherwise he can't attend.

Volunteer Drivers through Cromwell Community House and ACAN, St John Health Shuttle to Dunedin Hospital

Family, friends, neighbors, health shuttle- when these not available very limited options

Relying on someone else to drive them or paying huge amounts for a taxi.

Mobility scooter, rides with friends or family, Volunteer Driver service, Health Shuttle

RELYING ON FRIENDS/FAMILY/NEIGHBOURS OR VOLUNTEER SERVICES



Approximately how many of your clients are affected by public transport issues?

12 responses

Work at a population level, not individual so N/A.

I could only say those who I have had conversations with in this regard, about 10 elderly people are of most concern.

probably 50% as there is a compulsory medical stand down period post Stroke and some do not regain their license

We see approx 10 a week contacting the community house to ask for options.

ten

5

NA

30 regular clients per month

Not a high proportion but when there is a need it is a high one and usually urgent

Unknown

30-40

50



What do you think is the biggest need/area to focus on in regards to improving public transport in Central Otago?

12 responses

Unsure.

At all levels, local transport within towns as well as between towns, what if your car breakdown and you can't afford to fix it or have to wait, how will you get to work is of concern.

Affordable and accessible public transport

People accessing health appointments which are now spread over multiple locations for the same person (Queenstown, Dunedin, Invercargill).

about half of them

Taxi service around Alexandra and daily bus service between Alexandra, Cromwell, Queenstown and maybe Wanaka

For us it would be something like Freedom driving which specialises for the disability and aged care sector.

A service between towns

Access to health and social services, more regular accessible transport

Most specialist appointment are in Queenstown (when not in Dunedin) so people need to be able to travel into Queenstown

Accessible local transport and regional connections

SMALL ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT MAINLY FOR THE ELDERLY AND THOSE WITH DISABILITIES



## What solutions/ideas do you suggest to resolve these issues?

12 responses

Would need to identify the barriers first and analyse the budget to impact ratio.

Opportunities to set up a regional network that utilises the connectiveness of the towns

Looking at what might be an alternative if not able to use the Health Shuttle to travel to Dunedin, a public transport service that would accept total mobility discount cards.

Extension of the Health Shuttle program to cover different areas and needs

Have a pool of drivers that are happy for long distance travel from Alex to Dunedin etc

unsure

Its tricky for us as our son cant have to many stops on the way to and from, and would need a driver that can communicate in NZSL, or be patient enough to wait and listen to an AAC device. I know there is some families in our community that would also need wheelchair accessible transport. We would need a service that caters for the disability sector thats affordable. A taxi to and from Alexandra for Riding for Disabled, or Wanaka for Music therapy would just be unaffordable!

A regular shuttle or bus

A smaller bus with more frequent routes and ability to take people with mobility needs and be able to take babies/ children, otherwise would like a wider pool of community volunteer drivers with trained/ vetted drivers that different agencies can utilize and are able to drive some longer distances and have set days where a driver is available on short notice should a family ride fall through as happened today.

More public buses

Twice daily regional service from Queenstown to Alexandra with stops in Clyde and Cromwell. Work with local shuttle companies to get local total mobility provider up and running.

REGULAR TAXI SERVICE

