

Tuesday, March 25, 2025

# Draft Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 Feedback form

Unique ID

RPTP-0046

## Contact details

Name:

Dave Bainbridge-Zafar

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

No

## 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?

No

**Tell us more:**

Buses should be free for everyone, all the time!

The benefits of free public transport are many and varied; the environmental benefits are obvious - free buses = more people on the bus = less people driving and polluting.

But there are also public health benefits, social equity benefits, as well as economic benefits.

Many places around the world have already introduced completely free public transport for their citizens, and Otago should be next!

I firmly believe that free public transport is inevitable, its not a question of if, its a question of when, and who will go first. Why not Otago?

## 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

### 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?

No

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### 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

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### 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

#### Tell us more:

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

No

#### Tell us more:

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## 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.**

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### Fare-free public transport

Kia ora Councilor

Firstly, congratulations on your election, and good luck for the three years ahead!

Secondly, I'd like you to strongly consider the case for **free public buses in Dunedin**. ORC already subsidises the buses in Dunedin, and we have a great opportunity to provide further funding, that would have massive benefits across our great city.

Stantec are currently in the process of preparing a business case for a review of fares and frequency of the buses on behalf of Otago Regional Council, but I'd like ORC to consider the case for free buses for everyone in Dunedin. I am not a bus user, nor would I be if fares were free. I am a car driver, but I believe the benefits of free fares on Dunedin's buses are so great, that I still support my rates increasing to cover the cost of free buses.

The buses in Dunedin are currently funded from four revenue streams;

- 1) Dunedin City Council subsidy
- 2) Otago Regional Council subsidy
- 3) Waka Kotahi subsidy
- 4) Fares

The last of these, fares, is by far the smallest revenue stream, and I feel the benefits of fully free buses far outweighs the costs.

#### ***So what are the benefits of free buses?***

- Better parking
  - o The polls show that parking is a key issue for Dunedin residents. So this is win-win. More people on the bus = less people in cars = better parking availability for those who do drive.
- Less traffic
  - o As above, more people on the bus = less people in cars = less traffic on the road, and faster travel times for all.
- Faster buses
  - o With no fares, buses won't just be faster because there will be less traffic, they will also be faster as it will eliminate the delays at each bus stop as passengers search for the right change to pay the driver for their ticket.
- Safer for all
  - o With no fares, bus drivers are no longer responsible for a large sum of cash, which unfortunately makes them a target for criminals, with a number of bus drivers being robbed in recent years.
  - o It's also safer for passengers, with a recent study from Professor David Hasler at the University of New South Wales in Sydney demonstrating that bus travel is seven times safer than car travel.

- Social benefits
  - There are people in Dunedin who struggle to even pay the \$1 or \$2 fare for a bus, who can't get to a job interview because they can't afford the bus fare, or who can't accept that job offer because they can't afford to take a bus (or 2 or 3 buses) to get to work every day. Free fares will help get more people into work, contributing to our economy, and contributing to our society.
  - Likewise, bus fares can sometimes be a barrier for access to healthcare. Removing fares will help more people get access to the help and services they need.
- Economic benefits
  - There are also many benefits to local businesses with more people using the bus; it encourages more travel! People are more likely to hop on a bus to Port Chalmers, or Portobello, to try out a new café, or visit some new shops.
  - Additionally, going door to door in a private car reduces foot traffic for shops and businesses, who might otherwise be able to tempt customers inside while they walk to the bus stop.
  - It would also put Dunedin on the map, and be a draw for tourists and visitors from around NZ and the rest of the world, knowing Dunedin is a place to visit, where you can see the whole city, and travel around without worrying about paying for the bus.
- Health benefits
  - Many people now live very sedentary lifestyles. We go from our house to our car to our work, where we sit. And while it may be too far for most people to walk or bike to work, most people can walk to the nearest bus stop, and from the bus stop to their work. Even this small amount of walking can have massive health benefits for people.
- Environmental benefits
  - Lastly, climate change is the biggest threat to our society, to our way of life, that humanity has ever faced. It is our moral obligation to do everything we can to reduce the use of fossil fuels, and getting more people on to buses (especially with the Dunedin bus fleet moving to electric next year) is one more contribution in the fight against climate change.

And ultimately, public transport is a public service, and just like public libraries and public toilets should be free to use. Other people using the bus is a direct benefit to everyone, whether a car driver, pedestrian or cyclist, as there will be fewer cars on the road, leading to less pollution, less emissions, less traffic, safer roads. And as a public benefit to all, whether you use it or not, you should pay for it through your rates, in the same way you pay for the public art gallery, and public parks, whether or not you visit to look at the paintings or play on the swings.

Free public transport is also massive in terms of equity; public transport is often of most value to the poorest members of society, people who can't afford to own and run a car, so it should be funded by rate payers, where those with more, pay proportionally more, rather than the current model, where we only charge those who have least, and often, need it most.

Not just that, its popular with the public too. A recent survey of Aucklanders has shown most of its residents support free public transport. The poll by First Union and the Public Service Association, released a few weeks ago, shows 73% of people support making public transport permanently free.

And it would not be a first, free public transport is happening all over the world. In 2012, the 420,000 residents of Tallinn, capital of Estonia, voted-in free public transport. Buses are now free in most Estonian counties. In 2020, Luxembourg became the first country to make all public buses, trams and trains fare-free. Malta became the second when it introduced zero-fares just last month.

An even more intriguing case study is the city of Hasselt, a small Belgian city with a population of 70,000 people. Hasselt had a stagnating bus network typical of most small cities, with hardly any passengers. As a last ditch experiment the council waived bus fares. The following day, 100 more passengers used buses; the day after that, 1000 more; the day after that, 1500 more. Nine years later, the city has had a 1265% increase in bus use, even on its miserly bus timetable of two services an hour on most routes. Now, it is easier than ever to find a park in the central area. Interestingly, through those nine years, there has been no reduction in household car ownership; the citizens just use them less.

At local government, you have access to many policy levers to move society, some push factors, some pull factors. One of our goals should be less car use; more people being more active, and discouraging car use by being generous with bus travel is a much nicer idea than punishing motorists with such things as carbon taxes or congestion charges or higher parking fees. Zero-fare bus travel is in keeping with the way most municipal services, including footpaths, parks and museums are funded and provided.

#### ***So what would it cost?***

According to recent numbers from Orbus, Dunedin buses take in about \$3m-\$4m per year in fares, against the \$21m it receives from ORC funding. Ultimately, an empty bus costs the same to run as a full bus; the same cost for the driver, the same cost for the vehicle, so it may as well be a full bus. With total rates revenue of around \$47m, an 8% rates increase should be enough to make buses in Dunedin completely free.

I will soon be attending a public forum to present this issue in person, but would welcome any questions or feedback in advance. Please email me on the below address.

I've also sent similar letters to Dunedin City Councillors, Dunedin MPs, and the Minister of Transport, the honourable Michael Wood, MP.

I feel this is a great opportunity to be bold, and do a great thing for our great city, that would really be win-win-win for everyone!

Yours sincerely

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