

Friday, May 2, 2025

Draft Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 Feedback form

Unique ID

RPTP-0483

Contact details

Name:

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

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

Tell us more:

I'm concerned that the draft plan prioritises environmental sustainability through expensive upgrades like electric buses, while simultaneously proposing fare increases. While reducing emissions is important, this approach risks undermining the very goal it aims to achieve.

Higher fares make public transport less accessible — especially for those on lower incomes — and discourage people from using it. This could lead to lower ridership, which in turn reduces the environmental and financial benefits of the network. The most effective way to achieve both sustainability and equity is by keeping fares low and increasing use of existing services.

Encouraging more people to take the bus by making it affordable is a far more cost-effective and environmentally sound strategy. Fewer cars on the road means lower emissions — and that doesn't require a fleet of new vehicles. The greenest option is often to maximise what we already have, rather than invest heavily in new infrastructure that comes with its own environmental and financial costs.

Let's focus on affordability and accessibility first — sustainability will follow.

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

Tell us more:

I strongly support the proposal to establish a subsidised community transport programme, especially for smaller towns and rural areas like those in Waitaki. Access to affordable and reliable transport is a major issue for many people in our district, particularly for those who are older, live alone, or don't drive. A community transport service could significantly improve access to essential services, reduce social isolation, and strengthen rural resilience.

In particular, transport for health services is a critical need in Waitaki. To ensure the success of this programme, I recommend that Otago Regional Council works closely with Health NZ to coordinate service delivery. For example, if medical appointments for people from the same area could be scheduled on the same day, transport services could run more efficiently and cost-effectively.

To be successful, the programme should be designed with community input, flexible enough to meet local needs, and well-promoted so residents know what's available.

To ensure long-term success and sustainability, support should be provided to help these initiatives establish the necessary organisational structures and legal entity status (e.g., as charitable trusts). This would enable them to apply for grants and external funding, reducing pressure on council funding and allowing services to grow based on community need.

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?

Tell us more:

I understand the need to balance affordability with financial sustainability, but I'm concerned that a 25% fare increase in one step is too steep — especially during a cost-of-living crisis. This could deter regular passengers and discourage new users, which undermines both the financial and environmental goals of public transport.

Instead, I suggest implementing a more gradual, staged fare increase and review ridership after each stage before moving to the next. This would allow passengers time to adjust and would avoid sudden cost shocks, especially for low-income users who rely on public transport the most.

Other suggestions:

- Introduce fare capping (daily/weekly maximum spend) to help frequent users manage costs
- Offer off-peak discounts to encourage use when capacity is underutilised

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:

I do not support the introduction of a zone fare system. While charging more for longer trips may seem fair in principle, in practice it disproportionately affects those who can least afford it.

Many people are already being pushed out of central Dunedin due to high housing costs and limited housing availability. As the city grows, land for new housing in central areas is limited, meaning more people will need to live in outer suburbs or nearby towns. Public transport should be part of the solution to this housing pressure – not another cost barrier for people who are already being priced out of central locations.

A zone fare system penalises people based on where they live rather than how often they travel. This is particularly unfair to low-income communities like Palmerston, where people rely on public transport to access essential services, work, and education. Increasing fares for these users risks isolating them even more.

Flat fares are simple, equitable, and predictable. They encourage more widespread use of public transport (which has financial benefits) and are easier for all users to understand.

Personally, I live in Waitati and take the bus regularly. A zone fare system would likely make it too expensive (and too much of a trade off when the bus service is already inconvenient and unreliable), and I would consider driving instead – which increases traffic and emissions.

Maintaining a flat fare system – or introducing only very minimal zone-based variation – is a far better approach.

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:

In general, I support the proposal to keep free fares for children (5-12 years).

However, if necessary, to help balance financial sustainability with accessibility, I suggest two potential compromises. First, a small nominal fare (e.g. \$0.50) could be introduced for children. This would still make public transport affordable for families, while helping to offset some operational costs.

Second, in conjunction, fare capping could be implemented for children, allowing unlimited travel within a certain period (e.g. a daily or weekly cap). This would ensure families are not burdened by high costs for

frequent travel, while still maintaining a clear limit on expenses. It also allows for more predictable costs, which could be helpful for budgeting.

By introducing these changes, the need to raise adult fares could be reduced or avoided altogether (and same for zoning), as the nominal charge and fare capping would help generate additional revenue without placing a heavy financial burden on families. This could allow the focus to remain on affordable fares for all passengers.

Ultimately, while keeping fares affordable for children is key, introducing a nominal charge alongside fare capping could help balance the needs of families and the financial sustainability of the service for everyone.

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

Yes

Tell us more:

No strong opinion.

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.

In general, I'm concerned about the overall affordability of this plan — both for public transport users and for ratepayers. The reality is that the costs of running and upgrading the network will either fall on fare increases or rates rises, and most people simply can't afford either right now. We're in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, and affordability needs to be the top priority.

While I understand the desire to pursue environmental sustainability, I reiterate my earlier comments: these goals should not come at a financial cost to already stretched households. Increasing fares or spending heavily on new infrastructure, such as electric buses, may sound like progress — but if it makes public transport less accessible, the wider environmental and social benefits will be lost. Encouraging more people to use the bus by keeping fares low and making better use of the assets we already have is a far more practical and financially sustainable approach.

We need to focus on building a system that works for the communities who rely on it every day — not just the aspirational goals that look good on paper. Keeping costs down for users should be at the heart of the plan.