

Sunday, April 27, 2025

Draft Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 Feedback form

Unique ID

RPTP-0344

Contact details

Name:

Dave Macpherson

Organisation (if applicable):

SaveOurTrains - Otepoti/Dunedin

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:

Yes, but not fully. The RPTP lacks sufficient forward vision, particularly in respect of the growing use (yes, even in New Zealand, including Otago) of passenger rail.

We are very disappointed that there is NOT ONE WORD OF RECOGNITION of our previous submissions on this subject, and that the authors of the RLTP do not seem to know what a train looks like.

This is especially problematic given that Canterbury Region has included rail as a future transport mode in its RPTP - noting that Otago RC informed us in 2024 that it would consult the South Island RTC Chairs' Committee about how it might incorporate rail in future.

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:

See our more detailed submission attached.

Existing and future passenger rail services can play a role in the provision of community transport services, and the ORC should a/. recognise this, and b/.enable and support this.

We make some proposals for developing this, including transitional proposals for using existing Dunedin Railways services to provide PT trips for Oamaru, East Otago, Taieri and Strath Taieri passengers.

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

Tell us more:

No, but we understand you may be forced to by the current Government.

Recent international (Queensland, Luxembourg) and NZ evidence shows that well-promoted fare reductions contribute to significant increases in public transport patronage (including, but not exclusive to, rail). If ORC wishes to truly approach emission, mode-shift, accessibility and affordability targets, then fare REDUCTIONS are a better direction to head.

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:

No, but we understand the pressure to do so.

Look at what Queensland has just done (50c fares for all PT trips) and the effect that has had on increased patronage, not to mention improved safety, affordability, accessibility and mode shift. (See attached link) Those who work and study in Dunedin CBD should not be penalised financially to having to live further from their place of work or study.

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:

Yes, but note the Queensland experience - where 50c fares all round has totally simplified the fare structure, meaning far less bureaucracy and software is needed, while still making it cheaper for most and affordable for all.

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

Yes

Tell us more:

Whatever fare structures you have, and whatever transport mode is used, all parts of the Region should have the same rates. Note that Waikato Region has a zonal charging system which is the same for all parts of its Region and for both bus and rail modes.

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.

We request 12-15 minutes for our in-person presentation.

Please see attachments/links:

1. SaveOurTrains Otepoti-Dunedin Submission to RPTP (emailed under separate cover)
2. Comments on Canterbury RC inclusion of rail as a future activity in their RPTP (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/ldr/545675/rail-still-seen-as-crucial-to-canterbury-s-future?>)
3. Report on Queensland public transport 50c fare initiative

SUBMISSION TO ORC ON REGIONAL PASSENGER TRANSPORT PLAN

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61550775020055>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/saveourtrains>

Website: <https://thefutureisrail.org/otago>



Yes, ORC.....passenger trains do travel through the Otago Region, and should be recognised - both now and for the future - in the Regional Passenger Transport Plan.

Introductory Comments

We are very disappointed that the draft Regional Passenger Transport Plan 2025 makes not a single mention of rail as a form of transport in Otago, whether for passenger or freight purposes – especially given

- a. the fairly heavy, and growing, use of passenger rail for tourist purposes in the Region, noting that
 - i. there is a large use of rail for cruise ship passengers exiting and returning to Port Chalmers, but only mention of the bus passengers doing so, and
 - ii. that charter rail-based tours are now travelling through Otago dozens of times a year, and
 - iii. that even the Government owned-Kiwirail is now running excursion passenger rail trips to and from Dunedin, and
 - iv. Dunedin Railways Ltd continues to see a return to higher passenger numbers on its 'local services', and has enhanced and regularised its schedule for the 2025-6 season, with its Dunedin City Council owners recently **unanimously** endorsing DRL's continuation, and likely return of services to Middelmarsh.
- b. the strong support for the restoration of passenger rail from residents right through coastal Otago, and
- c. The inclusion of rail as a future mode of public transport in the Canterbury RPTP, and
- d. The confirmation by the **current** Government of new passenger rail rolling stock purchases and services in the lower North Island, and of existing and growing passenger rail services in that area and in the upper North Island, and

- e. The recent decision by the Minister for Rail, Rt Hon Winston Peters, for the Government to purchase two **rail-enabled ferries** for Cook Strait, securing the rail link to the North Island for several decades into the future.

We question why, when the RLTP is supposed to be casting its eye forwards for 30 years, there is yet again no mention of rail, given the above points and the growing worldwide trend towards more passenger rail services.

Are the authors of the draft Otago RPTP selling Otago residents short?

Do they believe the southern South Island does not deserve the same transport choices as other major areas of the country?

We re-state the benefits of passenger rail:



We are not ‘trainspotters’ and don’t argue that the ‘glory days’ of steam engines and daily trains to Owaka and Cromwell, etc., can be restored.

However, we equally don’t agree with the comments by at least one senior ORC official in 2024 that passenger train services are ‘not viable’ and could never be ‘afforded’. The Waikato community faced similar shibboleths four years ago, but persisted with a successful and growing passenger rail service between Hamilton and Auckland – one that is adding more stations, services, and likely regions, as it proves its worth and shows public demand.

Public passenger rail will not replace current local bus services, and should not replace the active transport modes of walking and cycling, but can be successfully integrated with those modes, to the benefit of all. It can provide

- a. Medium distance and inter-regional public transport connecting communities that have little or no public transport options;
- b. Commuter services with much higher capacity on key congested routes;

- c. A far lower carbon emission footprint than other modes of transport – not just with the newer hybrid engine systems, but even using existing rolling stock;
- d. An opportunity for significant mode shift on routes served by rail lines;
- e. Greater accessibility for disabled residents, and residents unable to use active forms of transport (eg Intercity Buses will not carry anyone with a mobility impairment sufficient to need a walker or wheelchair, or needing assistance up the steep bus steps);
- f. More affordable inter-regional travel; and
- g. Integration of PT services, and ticketing, across modes (eg combined bus and rail journeys); and
- h. Tourist transport options that significantly reduce air and car travel.

Our medium and longer term vision for passenger rail in the South

SaveOurTrains Otepoti-Dunedin envisions

- a. A daily, each-way passenger rail service between Christchurch and Invercargill, via Dunedin;
- b. Using equivalent hybrid diesel-electric units (railcar-type) to those currently ordered for the Palmerston North – Wellington, Wairapa – Wellington and likely the Hamilton – Auckland services;
- c. A 'limited express' mode, stopping at key regional centres (eg Ashburton, Timaru, Oamaru, Palmerston, Mosgiel/Airport, Balclutha, Gore);
- d. Incorporating bike-carrying facilities, wheelchair enabled, wifi service and onboard café;
- e. Integrating with local PT bus services (eg the major cities, plus Timaru, Mosgiel/Airport);
- f. Funded – as with the Hamilton, Palmerston North and Wairapa services – by a mixture of affordable passenger fares, locally-collected rating support and central Government PT support;
- g. Connecting tourist passengers (unsubsidised) with existing tourist train services (Taieri Gorge, Trans-Alpine, Coastal Pacific), and tourist coach services (eg Oamaru-Aoraki/Mt Cook).

Proposals for interim establishment of passenger rail Public Transport services:



Oamaru and Middelmarsh Railway Stations – being serviced by Dunedin Railways Ltd....an opportunity to provide trial public transport options

There are **immediate passenger rail opportunities for ORC to support limited trial public** transport options for passengers travelling between Dunedin and both Oamaru and the Strath Taieri area (currently Pukerangi, and in future Middelmarsh).

Dunedin Railways Ltd (DRL), a wholly-owned CCO of Dunedin City Council, already runs publicly bookable passenger rail services to Oamaru (monthly) and Strath Taieri (approximately twice per week, moving to 5 times weekly from September 2025). In addition other charter services, almost always with spare seats, run to both venues on a weekly, or more frequent, basis for much of the year.

DRL sells one-way and return tickets on these services, which could be supported by ORC as a trial Public Transport service, **supporting access to two areas NOT currently served by any public transport.**

Dunedin residents, who contribute via DCC rates to the operational costs of DRL, pay a concessionary ticket price, and ORC could – as part of a Public Transport trial – also contribute to the cost of tickets on these services for local residents, bringing the cost of travel on these routes down to a level commensurate with standard PT costs elsewhere in this country.

Such access would need to be negotiated with DRL, but would represent an innovative (for this Region) way of enhancing Public Transport options in parts of the Region that they are difficult to provide.

Given that ORC has been unable to proceed with its contemplated Oamaru Public Transport trial, this may be one way to provide a more manageable service to support at least some needs of North Otago residents. In the box below is how this could possibly work:

CASE STUDY for Oamaru-Dunedin/Dunedin-Oamaru PT trips on Dunedin Railway services

- Normal one-way adult fare Dunedin-Oamaru = \$109
- Standard Public Transport funding arrangement is 1/3rd, 1/3rd, 1/3rd (passenger fare, local (ORC) subsidy, Govt PT subsidy, so about \$36 per passenger to ORC.
- Assume 32 one-way trips per year, 10 passengers per trip = \$11,520pa local contribution
- *\$11,520 central Govt PT funding
- 6,000 households in Oamaru; funding for trial collected from Oamaru ratepayers @ \$2 per residential property per year = \$12,000pa

Such a scenario would not involve ORC or any private operator purchasing or setting up any new infrastructure for a trial. Ticketing can be on DRL's existing system, with manual reporting to ORC during the trial period.

Waitaki District Council may wish to clean up and re-organise the Oamaru Railway station environs, but this would not be required to commence such a trial. Te Whatu Ora will also have a travel subsidy available for patients from Oamaru required to attend Dunedin Hospital for clinics and surgery – this could also be drawn on to support the 'local share'.

A one-way fare of \$36 compares with bus fares, when available, of \$22-\$50, and the Palmerston North-Wellington '*Capital Connection*' one-way rail fare of \$36.

A similar arrangement could be organised for rail services up to the Strath Taieri (Pukerangi/Middlemarch), noting that local residents, being part of the DCC area, already receive some subsidy.

There are other interim/trial opportunities for provision of Public Transport services, utilising DRL and Kiwirail rolling stock that could be supported by ORC:

- Mosgiel-Stadium services for major sports matches and concerts

- Christchurch-Stadium services for major sports matches and concerts
- Christchurch – Dunedin services for the start and end of the University academic year, and holiday periods.

In these situations, event ticket prices could be loaded with a rail fare surcharge to enable free travel, or grants from the University could be sought to support the latter type of trip.

What about the Government attitude towards (against?) passenger rail?

Governments come and go, but this Plan covers a 30-year period, including a 10-year investment period.

It is important that ORC develops its own plan that represents its communities' current and future transport needs – not one that flip-flops from one direction to another as Governments change stripe, perhaps every three years.

"It is important that we have our own vision, rather than just considering what the present government's priorities are, because governments change and we need to be ready for opportunities when they arise." (Cr Sara Templeton, Christchurch City Council, March 2025; in support of the Canterbury Regional Public Transport Plan's inclusion of passenger rail as a future transport mode.)

We should also note that the current Government has made three important moves that support future passenger rail:

- a. Decided to continue the *Te Huia* pilot passenger rail service between Hamilton & Auckland (May 2024)
- b. Confirmed the purchase of Hybrid Diesel/Electric rolling stock for the lower North Island (July 2024)
- c. Confirmed a plan to purchase two rail-enabled ferries for the Cook Strait run (March 2025).

Therefore, it's not a foregone conclusion that the Government would automatically oppose such a small trial initiative – especially not since an election year is coming up!

Nor is the Government likely to oppose the inclusion of future passenger rail provision in the 30-year strategy – we'll leave the wording to ORC, although you could do worse than copy and paste Canterbury's passenger statements.

So we need the ORC to have some courage.

Fares fair in the Sunshine State?

50 cent flat fares have been made permanent for urban public transport networks state-wide in Queensland, Australia. But what has been their impact?



[DARREN DAVIS](#)

APR 18, 2025



Context

Queensland launched 50 cent flat fares across all urban bus networks in the state in August 2024 (including free transfers), initially as a cost of living relief measure implemented in the lead-up to the October 26 2024 state election. In that election, a new state government was elected which has continued 50 cent flat fares and made them permanent. 50 cent fares have been in place for eight months now so it's timely to have a look at their impact.

50 cent fares patronage impacts

The state government noted in a media release¹ the following achievements in South East Queensland (SEQ) since the introduction of 50 cent flat fares.

- Patronage increased on all modes of SEQ public transport between August 5 and the end of October:
- Bus: Increase of 14.3 per cent on the same period in 2023.
- Train: Increase of 17.9 per cent on the same period in 2023.
- Gold Coast Light Rail: Increase of 22.1 per cent on the same period in 2023.

- Ferries (Brisbane River and Southern Moreton Bay Islands): Increase of 43.9 per cent on the same period in 2023.
- SEQ across all modes: Increase of 16.7 per cent on the same period in 2023.
- SEQ public transport patronage between August 5 and the end of October 2024 was up 5.1 per cent on the same period pre-COVID

Of note is that South East Queensland has 72 per cent of the state's population but 94 per cent of the state's urban public transport trips.

In looking at the various further out parts of SE Queensland, the impacts have been universally positive. For example:

- Noosa Shire (+35 per cent)
- City of Logan (+20 per cent)
- City of Gold Coast (+21 per cent)
- Sunshine Coast Council (+37 per cent).

And in regional Queensland, there have also been big benefits averaging 20 per cent across all networks with strong outcomes in:

- Gympie (+49 per cent)
- North Stradbroke Island (+39.29 per cent)
- Mackay (+40.92 per cent)
- Townsville (+49.29 per cent).

All of these figures are compared to the same period in 2023.

Let me be the first to say that improving public transport frequency and reliability are far more important than reducing price in increasing patronage. It goes without saying that you can't use public transport that doesn't exist, no matter how cheap it is.

Subscribe

"It goes without saying that you can't use public transport that doesn't exist, no matter how cheap it is."

50 cent fares and affordability

But, on the other hand, 50 cent fares pretty much kills any notion in public discourse that people can't afford public transport. Prior to 50 cent fares, a single peak journey from Varsity Lakes in the southern Gold Coast to Brisbane cost \$14.55, meaning over a 96% reduction in public transport costs for southern Gold Coast commuters to Brisbane city centre.

Even for the cheapest one zone peak Go Card fare of \$3.55, the saving with 50 cent fares is 86 per cent.

Zones travelled	Adult fares (9 January 2023)		
	go card	go card off-peak	Single paper ticket
1	\$3.55	\$2.84	\$5.10
2	\$4.34	\$3.47	\$6.30
3	\$6.63	\$5.30	\$9.60
4	\$8.72	\$6.98	\$12.60
5	\$11.46	\$9.17	\$16.60
6	\$14.55	\$11.64	\$21.10
7	\$18.10	\$14.48	\$26.20
8	\$21.48	\$17.18	\$31.10

Go Card and paper ticket fares prior to 50 cent fares

There is now no difference between card and cash fares, noting that cash fares are only available for purchase at a ticketing machine at railway stations, ferry terminals, light rail stops and busway stations.

Unsurprisingly, some of the biggest patronage uplift has been on longer-distance journeys from the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast to Brisbane. This is particularly important given their role as domestic and international visitor destinations. Given that free transfers are included in the 50 cent fare, the longest possible journey for 50 cents would be from Gympie in the north to the New South Wales border, a distance of 276 kilometres, or less than 0.2 cents per kilometre. Which is pretty good value for money at a time when cost of living is top of mind in Australia and elsewhere.

Annual savings from 50 cent fares to Brisbane City Centre

1 zone fare - Kedron Brook - 10 km - 3 days a week - \$1,092.00

3 zone fare - Ipswich - 37 km - 3 days a week - \$2,558.40

6 zone fare - Varsity Lakes - 85 km - 3 days a week - \$4,383.60

8 zone fare - Noosa Heads - 150 km - 3 days a week - \$6,545.76

Even for the cheapest former fares, there's still a return flight to Bali in savings from three day a week commuting over a year. For medium to long-distance commuters, this would likely run to a return flight to Europe.

The example of airfares is purely illustrative as a lot of Aussie households are under significant financial and mortgage stress. And a lot of the money saved will have gone to household budgets for everyday items.

As at 30 November 2024, the Queensland government estimated that Queenslanders had already saved \$100 million, in less than four months, based on travel patterns and patronage in the lead-up to 50 cent fares.

And I have noticed a significant reduction in fare evasion as a result of 50 cent fares. Which would mean that some of the patronage increase is coming from people who were already travelling before but are now paying for the journey.

An interesting downside of 50 cent fares is that there is no such thing as a concession fare as all fares are 50 cents, except for the following groups who still get free travel.

- Children aged 4 years old and under
- Totally and Permanently Incapacitated/ Extreme Disablement Adjustment Veteran Travel card holders

- Vision Impairment Travel Pass holders
- Translink Access Pass holders
- go access Travel Trainer card holders


So, apart from these relatively limited groups, everyone pays the same and can use any form of Go Card to travel. This means that it is no longer possible to get an accurate breakdown of various forms of concession travel such as children, tertiary students and older adults.







On the other hand, the recent completion of the smart ticketing project in SE Queensland, where customers can pay for their journey with a contactless Visa, Mastercard and American Express credit or debit card, including those in a digital wallet, overcomes a key barrier to public transport use which was the requirement to have a Go Card, especially in SE Queensland where buses do not accept cash. This is itself is likely to generate increased patronage. According to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, one of the earliest stages of the smart ticketing roll-out on Brisbane River ferries led to 20 per cent of fares being by credit or debit cards, including digital wallets on phones².



Travel time comparison


In the case of travel from the southern Gold Coast to Queen Street mall in Brisbane City centre, assuming needing to be there by 8:25am, the choice for mid-week in early March is between:

- **Car:** 1 hour 10 minutes to 2 hours. Therefore needing to leave at 6:25am to guarantee an 8:25am arrival. Note that the car travel time doesn't appear to including walking time as 141 Queen Street is on the Queen Street Mall so not accessible by car.


Arrive by ▾
Options

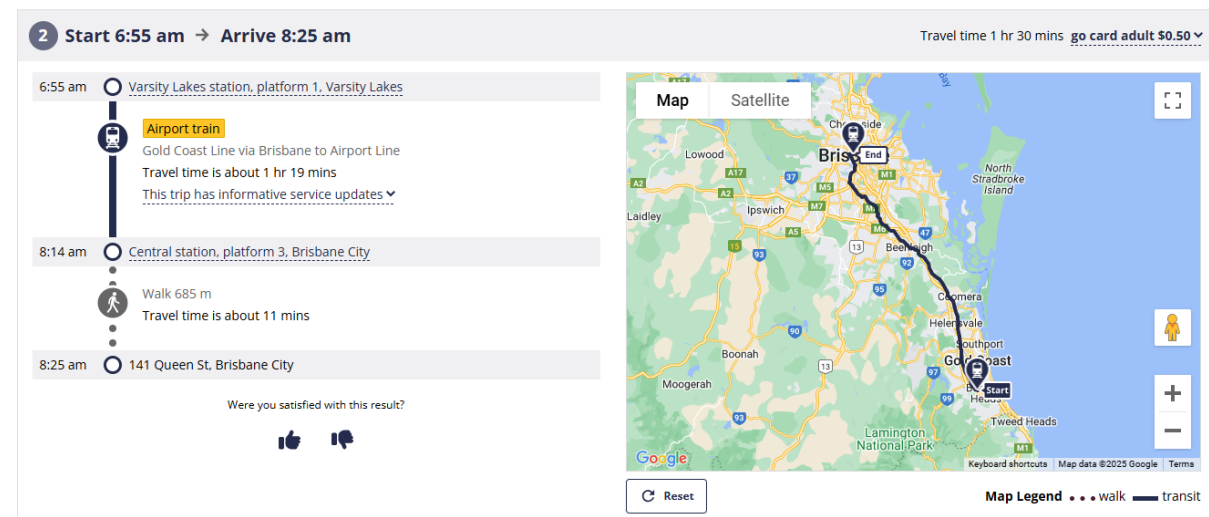
 8:25 am
 

 Wed, 5 Mar
 



Send directions to iPhone
 Copy link


via M1
typically 1 hr 10 min to 2 hr

Details
Leave around 6:25 am
85.0 km

Train: 1 hour 19 minutes on train + 11 minutes walking = 1 hour 30 minutes. The all-day Gold Coast Line express pattern has substantial sections of 140 km/h running between Beenleigh to Varsity Lakes, taking 30 minutes to cover 50 kilometres, including station stops. And Cross River Rail will reduce the walking time from 11 minutes from Central Station to 3 minutes from the new Albert Street Station.



In the case of rail (and busway) services, travel times are much more predictable and reliable than for car travel. Effectively, you save 30 minutes by travelling by train and of course, time on board a train (or bus, or ferry, or tram) can be put to better use than time spend driving. So where competitive travel times and affordable fares come together, the incentive to mode shift from 50 cent fares becomes that much stronger. As always, it's the service that drives patronage, supported by fares, not the other way around.

Park and Ride and Hide and Ride

The flat fare also gets rid of any fare zone boundary issues where there is strong park and ride (or hide and ride) capacity issues around fare zone boundaries. This has had significant impacts at stations that were on zone boundaries at express train stops. There is no price incentive to drive to cheaper fare zones. But also counterbalancing impacts at outer stations on the network which are likely to be experiencing increased parking pressure in the middle of the week, when more people are working from the office in Brisbane city centre.

Impact on parking in Brisbane City Centre

One of the big impacts of 50 cent fares has been the plummeting price of all-day parking in Brisbane city centre. Prior to 50 cent fares, all-day parking cost around \$80 per day. Clearly, 50 cent fare has had an impact on parking demand as early bird parking deals are now available around \$30 per day.

Wintergarden, Brisbane City QLD Car Park

102m • 162 Elizabeth Street

Enter between

05:00AM - 09:30AM

Fri 10 Jan

Exit between

09:31AM - 11:59PM

Fri 10 Jan

Select - \$32

Enter after

07:42AM

Fri 10 Jan

Exit before

05:00AM

Sat 11 Jan

Select - \$30

Secure Parking [early bird pricing](#) in Brisbane city centre, 8 January 2025

While \$30 per day is a lot cheaper than the previous \$80 or more per day, it's also still a lot more expensive than \$1 per day return travel on public transport. But somewhat ironically, 50 cent fares is also leading to significant cost savings for entrenched car drivers who are saving around \$600 per month if they work in the city centre three weekdays a week and a whopping \$1,000 per month if they work on site in the city centre five weekdays a week (noting that weekend parking prices are much cheaper than weekday parking prices).

It has to be a supremely ironic outcome of 50 cent fares that the people who have saved the most money are city centre car commuters whether or not they switched to public transport as a result of 50 cent fares. Noting of course that they will save a lot more if they switch to public transport than driving and parking.

Final thoughts

In 2022/2023, SEQ public transport patronage was 153.3 million, increasing to 167.8 million in 2023/2024. But if South East Queensland sustains the current 5.1% increase in patronage over pre-Covid patronage, patronage could reach close to 200 million trips in the 2024/2025 financial year, noting that the significant network impacts of ex-tropical cyclone Alfred may put a dent in this.

South East Queensland public transport patronage

2018/2019 - 189.7 million

2022/2023 - 153.3 million

2023/2024 - 167.8 million

2024/2025 - ~200 million? (guesstimate only)

If realised, that would be a patronage increase of 30 per cent in two years. Given that there has been only very limited changes in public transport services in that period, that increase

is really only attributable to post-pandemic patronage recovery and the impact of 50 cent fares.

But 50 cent fares come at a price in foregone revenue which has to be paid for. As always, there is an opportunity cost in money that could have been invested in increased frequency, span and coverage of services. This is estimated to cost Queensland \$A1.5 billion over four years with the first six months alone coming in at a cost of \$A181 million in foregone farebox revenue³.

And, as noted previously, no fare, no matter how cheap or even free, can incentivise people to use public transport services that either don't exist, or are unattractive to use due to lack of frequency, span, coverage or disproportionate travel time when compared with driving.