

20 February 2026

Phil King
Director Regional Transport Connections
Waikato Regional Council

Dear Phil,

Submission: Taupō District – Public Transport & Total Mobility Issues and Opportunities

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input ahead of the first meeting of the Waikato Regional Public Transport Subcommittee.

As the Taupō District representative on the Public Transport Transport Sub-committee, I recently consulted with members of our local community regarding current services and future opportunities. The feedback below reflects lived experience across urban Taupō, Tūrangi, Mangakino/Tokoroa and surrounding rural areas. We are also aware of a recent survey undertaken by Waikato Regional Council, and look forward to receiving the results to perhaps reinforce some of the below.

1. Regional Connectivity & Timetable Coordination

A consistent theme raised was the lack of reliable same-day connectivity between Taupō District and Hamilton/Auckland, and also between Turangi and Taupo town centre.

Currently, the Taupō Connector service does not consistently align with onward bus services or Te Huia rail connections. This makes same-day return travel to Hamilton or Auckland difficult or, in some cases, unworkable. In addition, Turangi effectively has no commuter bus service for those employed in Taupo town and vice-versa.

This particularly impacts residents travelling for:

- Specialist medical appointments (Waikato Hospital, Auckland Hospital)
- Rehabilitation services
- Employment or tertiary education
- Airport access

By comparison, the Tokoroa and Te Kūti connectors are widely regarded as better aligned with onward connections. This demonstrates that effective intermodal coordination is achievable within the region.

Given the geographic scale of Taupō District and its reliance on regional centres for healthcare and essential services, We request that Waikato Regional Council undertake a timetable alignment review focused specifically on enabling practical same-day return travel between Taupō District and Hamilton/Auckland, and also between Turangi and Taupo town centre.

This would represent a targeted service optimisation rather than a structural overhaul, and we recognise that there will be challenges around this. We also recognise that an additional Turangi service would also involve additional expense to Taupo district ratepayers but consider it an option worth exploring.

2. Total Mobility – Accessibility & Rural Equity

The Total Mobility scheme is designed to assist eligible people with long-term impairments to access door-to-door transport services and enhance community participation.

In Waikato, the subsidy is 75% of the fare up to a capped amount determined by district. In Taupō District, the maximum contribution is \$18.75 per trip (75% of a \$25 capped fare¹).

While this may cover shorter urban trips, it is quickly exceeded for longer intra-district travel such as:

- Tūrangi to Taupō
- Mangakino to Taupō
- Rural-to-town medical travel

This results in significant out-of-pocket cost for eligible users.

By comparison, other rural Waikato districts have substantially higher fare caps. Given the geographic scale of Taupō District and the reliance on longer-distance travel for essential services, it would be appropriate to review whether the current Taupō fare cap adequately reflects rural realities and the intent of the Total Mobility scheme

Community feedback also identified operational accessibility concerns on some smaller vehicles, including:

- Narrow aisles
- Manual ramp deployment
- Limited storage space for walkers and mobility equipment

These practical design factors materially affect usability and dignity of access.

A review of both the fare cap and vehicle accessibility standards in Taupō District would be welcomed. **We do recognise that any increase in fare caps would affect ratepayers, and request that WRC provide us data including total number of Total Mobility trips each month, stats on distance travelled, and the total cost of fares.**

3. Fleet Size & Service Efficiency

Community views on fleet size were mixed.

Some perceive larger buses operating below capacity during off-peak periods. Others report that our smaller 13-seater vehicles can feel cramped and are not well suited to mobility users. In addition, it has been pointed out that the inability of these vehicles to carry bicycles is quite a limitation (the bike carriers were apparently removed recently for safety/stability reasons).

This suggests the opportunity for:

- Demand-responsive fleet allocation
- Time-of-day vehicle variation

¹ Refer: <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/total-mobility-scheme>

- Seasonal capacity adjustments
- A re-look at bike carrying facilities

A flexible deployment model may better match supply to actual demand patterns. Taupo District Council has some capacity to re-arrange timetables but the issue with these smaller vehicles remain.

4. On-Demand & Zone-Based Services

There was interest in exploring whether app-based, zone-oriented shared transport models (similar to those trialled in other regions) could complement fixed routes in lower-density areas.

Any such exploration would need to consider cost-effectiveness, but there may be scope for targeted pilots in areas with demonstrated mobility gaps.

5. Bus Stop Infrastructure

Repeated feedback identified a lack of adequate bus shelters and seating at certain stops.

Exposure to weather and limited shelter particularly affects:

- Elderly passengers
- Mobility users
- School students

A bus stop infrastructure audit, prioritising high-use and mobility-sensitive locations, would be a practical improvement. **We recognise that these are primarily responsibilities for Taupo District Council to implement, and to that end request that WRC continue to send us monthly reports for passenger numbers for us to examine and use for planning purposes.**

6. Student Transport – A Pragmatic Perspective

Taupō township is relatively compact, and many students are able to walk, cycle, or use alternative personal transport. Public transport is not expected to replace self-mobility in a town of this scale.

However, there may be specific gaps affecting students who:

- Are not eligible for Ministry-funded school bus services,
- Live beyond practical walking or cycling distance,
- Or rely on public transport for after-school activities.

The Ministry of Education does not fund school bus services where suitable public transport is available², which highlights the importance of coordination between agencies.

² Refer: <https://schooltransport.org.nz/policies/>

Rather than expanding services broadly, a pragmatic approach may include:

- Reviewing whether existing public routes reasonably align with school start and finish times,
- Ensuring student fare concessions (via Bee Card settings) are clearly communicated,
- Working with schools to identify any unintended transport gaps.

This approach supports independence and efficiency without attempting to create a metropolitan-style school transport system.

7. Airport Connectivity

There was also community interest in exploring whether seasonal or scheduled services between Taupō and Rotorua Airport could improve connectivity to national flight networks.

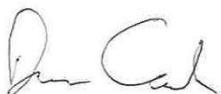
This could potentially be trialled during peak travel periods and assessed for viability. We recognise this would present an additional service and cost to the Taupo district ratepayer, but consider it an option worth exploring.

Summary of Key Themes

The dominant themes arising from community feedback were:

1. Regional and small community connectivity matters more than frequency.
2. Rural equity needs to be reflected in Total Mobility settings.
3. Accessibility must work in practice, not just in policy.
4. Infrastructure such as shelters materially affects usability.
5. Service optimisation is preferable to large-scale expansion.

I look forward to discussing these matters further at the 9 March meeting.



Cr Duncan Campbell
Taupō District Representative
Waikato Regional Public Transport Sub-committee