AGENDA

RTC Public Transport Subcommittee Meeting

Date: **Monday, 9 March 2026**
Time: **1:00 pm**
Location: **Council Chambers**
Waikato Regional Council
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

Members:
Cr Liz Stolwyk – Committee Chair – Waikato Regional Council
Cr Angela Strange – Committee Deputy Chair – Waikato Regional Council
Cr Ray Broad – Hauraki District Council
Cr Jo Butcher – Ōtorohanga District Council
Cr Duncan Campbell – Taupō District Council
Cr Mike Keir – Waikato District Council
Cr Mesh Macdonald – Hamilton City Council
Cr Sue Moroney – Hamilton City Council
Cr Janette Osborne – Waitomo District Council
Cr Mike Pettit – Waipā District Council
Cr Martin Rodley – Thames Coromandel District Council
Mayor Ash Tanner – Matamata Piako District Council
Cr Elvisa van der Leden – South Waikato District Council
Cr Andrew Corkill – Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (non-voting)

Alternates:
Cr Stephen Crooymans – Hauraki District Council
Cr Roger Gordon – Waipā District Council
Cr Sandra Greenslade – Taupō District Council
Cr Eugene Patterson – Waikato District Council
Cr Kerry Purdy – South-Waikato District Council
Deputy-Mayor James Sainsbury – Matamata Piako District Council
Cr Dan Tasker – Waitomo District Council
Cr Sarah Thomson – Hamilton City Council
Susan Collins – Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (non-voting)

RTC Public Transport Subcommittee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere **| Terms of Reference**

1. *Mana ā-Ture* **| Status**
   This is a Subcommittee of the Regional Transport Committee and was established by Council under clause 30(2) of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002. It is a discretionary committee that can be created or disestablished by Council or Regional Transport Committee resolution.

2. *Kawenga* **| Responsibilities**
   This Subcommittee is responsible for considering and making recommendations on:
   a. Preparing the *Regional Public Transport Plan* for endorsement by the Regional Transport Committee and adoption by Waikato Regional Council.
   b. Adopting non-significant (as defined in the Regional Public Transport Plan) variations to the *Regional Public Transport Plan*.
   c. Adopting non-significant (as defined in the *Regional Public Transport Plan*) variations to the Regional Public Transport Plan.
   d. Considering and making recommendations on matters relevant to regional implementation and monitoring of the *Regional Public Transport Plan*.
   e. Receiving regular monitoring reports and presentations on relevant public transport matters.
   f. Preparing recommendations on public transport strategy and programmes, and investment requirements, to the relevant authorities.

3. *Ngā Apatono* **| Powers**
   The Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:
   a. Prepare and recommend the Regional Public Transport Plan for endorsement and adoption.
   b. Recommend significant variations to the Regional Public Transport Plan to the Regional Transport Committee and Waikato Regional Council.
   c. Establish a single purpose hearings committee or subcommittee with appropriate representation to develop and hear submissions on the *Regional Public Transport Plan*.
   d. Advise on public transport strategy, programmes, and investment needs.

4. *Ngā Tūranga* **| Membership**
   4.1 *Ngā Mema* **| Members**
   The Subcommittee has sixteen members as follows:
   a. Two persons appointed by, and representative of Waikato Regional Council, one being the chair (or deputy-chair) of the Regional Transport Committee.
   b. Two persons appointed by, and representative of Hamilton City Council.
   c. One person appointed by, and representative of, the following territorial authorities in the Waikato region being:
      i. Hauraki District Council
      ii. Matamata-Piako District Council
      iii. Ōtorohanga District Council
      iv. South-Waikato District Council
      v. Taupō District Council
      vi. Thames Coromandel District Council
      vii. Waikato District Council
      viii. Waitomo District Council
      ix. Waipā District Council

   d. The Subcommittee includes the following non-voting members:
      i. One non-voting member appointed by the Auckland Council Governing Body.
      ii. One non-voting member appointed by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.
      iii. One person appointed by the Regional Transport Committee representing the disability, access and mobility sector in an advisory (non-voting) capacity.

4.2 *Ngā Kairīwhi* **| Alternates**
Any appointing agency or organisation may appoint one alternate member. Where the member appointed by the agency or organisation concerned is absent, the alternate will have full voting rights in the place of the absent member (where that member had those same rights).

4.3 *Mema-kore* **| Non-members**
The Subcommittee may invite non-member, non-voting experts to assist the Subcommittee, sitting at the Subcommittee table and with the same speaking rights as a member.

4.4 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua* **| Chair and Deputy-Chair**

a. The Chair of the Subcommittee is the Chair (or the Deputy-Chair), of the Regional Transport Committee as appointed above.
b. The Deputy-Chair is appointed by Council in accordance with clause 25 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002.

5. *Tokamatua* **| Quorum**
Seven voting members. *Refer clause 23(3)(b) of Schedule 7, Local Government Act 2002).*.

6. *Ngā Tikanga Pōti* **| Voting**
a. Decisions are made by majority vote of members present.
b. If votes are equal, the Chair has a deliberative and casting vote.

Refer clause 24 of Schedule 7, Local Government Act 2002.

7. *Ngā Hui i te Tau* **| Frequency of meetings**
Quarterly or as required.

Order Of Business

1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	**Cease o winds from the west**
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	**Cease o winds from the south**
Kia mākinakina ki uta	**Bring calm breezes over the land**
Kia mātaratara ki tai	**Bring calm breezes over the sea**
E hī ake ana te atakura	**And let the red-tipped dawn come**
He tio	**With a touch of frost**
He Huka	**A sharpened air**
He hau hū	**And promise of a glorious day**
Tīhei mauri ora!	**Behold we live**

2 APOLOGIES

3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA

4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

5 PRELIMINARY ITEMS

5.1 PUBLIC FORUM

Rā | Date: **2 March 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Jordan Metz, Democracy Advisor**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Dave Doggart, Team Lead, Democracy**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To provide details of speakers that are planning to present in the public forum, and to attach any materials that they may have supplied.
2. To provide an overview of the process and relevant standing orders pertaining to public forums.

KŌRERO WHAKATAHI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. Public forums are a defined period, usually at the start of an ordinary meeting, which, at the discretion of a meeting, is put aside for the purpose of public input. Public forums are optional and are designed to enable members of the public to bring matters of their choice, not necessarily on the meeting's agenda, to the attention of the local authority.
4. In the case of a committee or subcommittee, any issue, idea or matter raised in a public forum must also fall within the relevant terms of reference.

Time limits

5. Where implemented, public forums run for a period of up to 30 minutes, or such longer time as the meeting may determine. Requests to speak at a public forum (where available) must be made to the chief executive (or their delegate) at least 10 clear working days before the meeting; however, this requirement may be waived by the chair. Requests should also outline the matters that will be addressed by the speaker(s).
6. Speakers can speak for up to 5 minutes. Where the number of speakers presenting in the public forum exceeds 6 in total, the chair has discretion to restrict the speaking time permitted for all speakers.

Restrictions

7. The chair has the discretion to decline to hear a speaker at a public forum or to terminate a presentation at any time where:
   (a) A speaker is repeating views presented by an earlier speaker at the same public forum;
   (b) The speaker is criticising elected members and/or staff;
   (c) The speaker is being repetitious, disrespectful or offensive;
   (d) The speaker has previously spoken on the same issue;
   (e) The matter is subject to legal proceedings; and

(f) The matter is subject to a hearing, including the hearing of submissions where the local authority or committee sits in a quasi-judicial capacity.

Questions at public forums

8. At the conclusion of a presentation, with the permission of the chair, members may ask questions of speakers. Questions are to be confined to obtaining information or clarification on matters raised by a speaker.

No resolutions

9. Following the public forum, no debate or decisions will be made at the meeting on issues raised during the forum unless related to items already on the agenda.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

10. The rules pertaining to public forums are contained in the Standing Orders. The Executive Summary above contains an excerpt of those rules, but the Standing Orders are available on the Council website, or by clicking here.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 BRIEF SUBCOMMITTEE INDUCTION

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. At the first meeting of this new Regional Public Transport Subcommittee, a brief introduction to the region's public transport system will be provided.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Waikato has a significant public transport network, comprising buses operating on fixed and demand responsive routes, community transport, inter-regional rail and total mobility.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Brief Subcommittee Induction* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

3. A brief introduction will be provided to the Subcommittee. This will include objectives and priorities, funding and expenditure, regional rating and an overview of networks and routes.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

4. At the first meeting of this new Regional Public Transport Subcommittee, a brief introduction to the region's public transport system will be provided.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Introduction to Regional Public Transport (Doc#34760882) ⇩

Public Transport Introduction

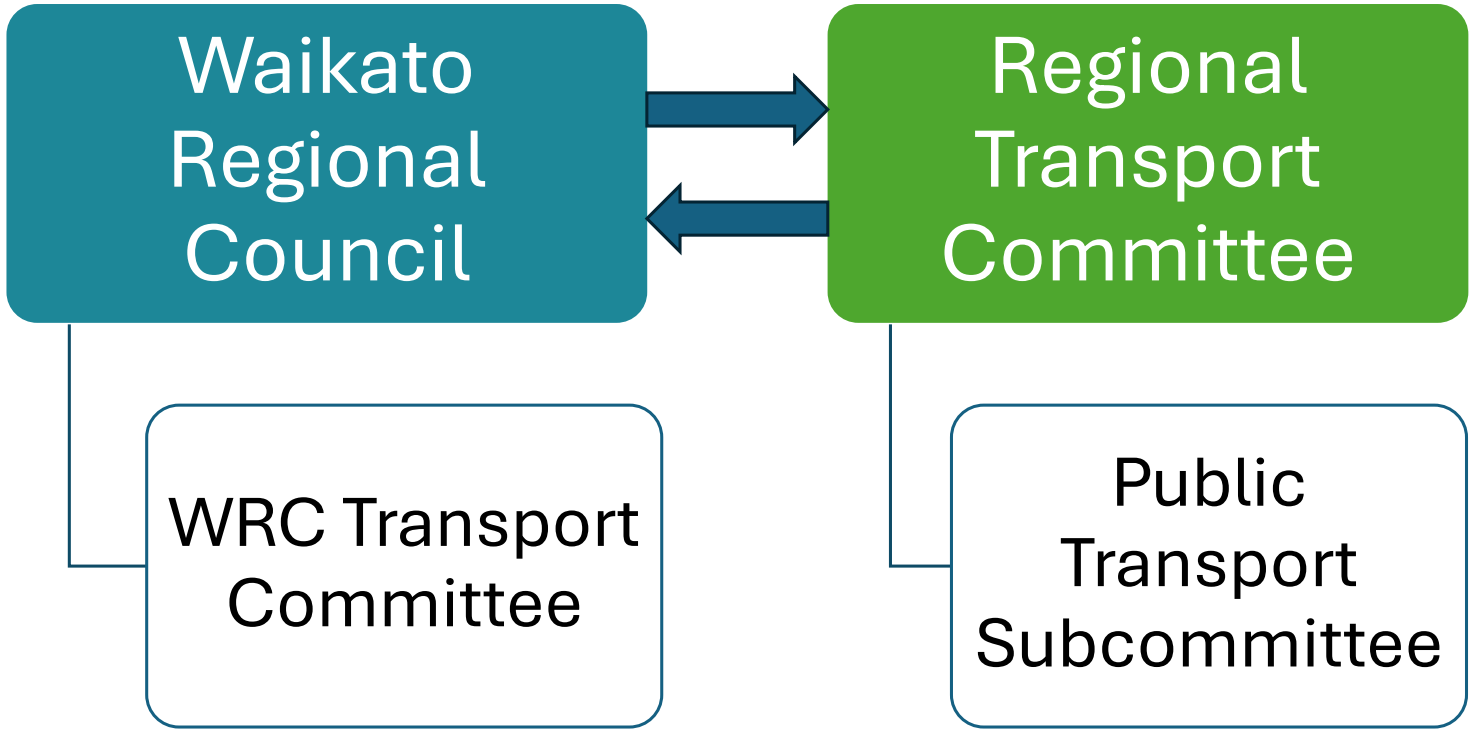
Regional Public Transport Subcommittee

9 March 2026

waikatoregion.govt.nz

Waikato REGIONAL COUNCIL Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Committee structures and roles 2025-2028



Public Transport Priorities - NZTA

1. Deliver on Govt Policy Statement Transport priorities:
    - Economic growth & productivity
    - Increased maintenance & resilience
    - Improved safety
    - Value for money
2. Enabling capacity for growth in the right place at the right time
3. Shaping urban form and growing productivity
4. Enhancing inclusive access
5. Improving the use of technology

Regional Council – Public Transport

Deliver Objectives of the Regional PT Plan 2022-2032

Achieve a step change in the public transport network and system over the next 30 years by:

1. Delivering a system that builds on existing services
2. Supporting accessibility and good urban form
3. Providing a larger proportion of the population with a viable alternative to the car
4. Is sustainable
5. Is affordable
6. Contributes to meeting our emission reduction targets

2025/26 Expenditure - $ rounded

Public transport services (bus) = $45.8M

Public transport services (rail) = $8.3M

Policy work (all) = $3M

Total Mobility = $2.4M

Road Safety = $0.8M

Community Transport = $0.7M

Stock Truck Effluent = $0.15M

TOTAL = $61.2M

Direct Costs = $56.2M

Salaries = $3.5M

Depreciation = $1.5M

TOTAL = $61.2M

2025/26 Revenue - $ rounded

Total public transport fares and other income = $10.3M

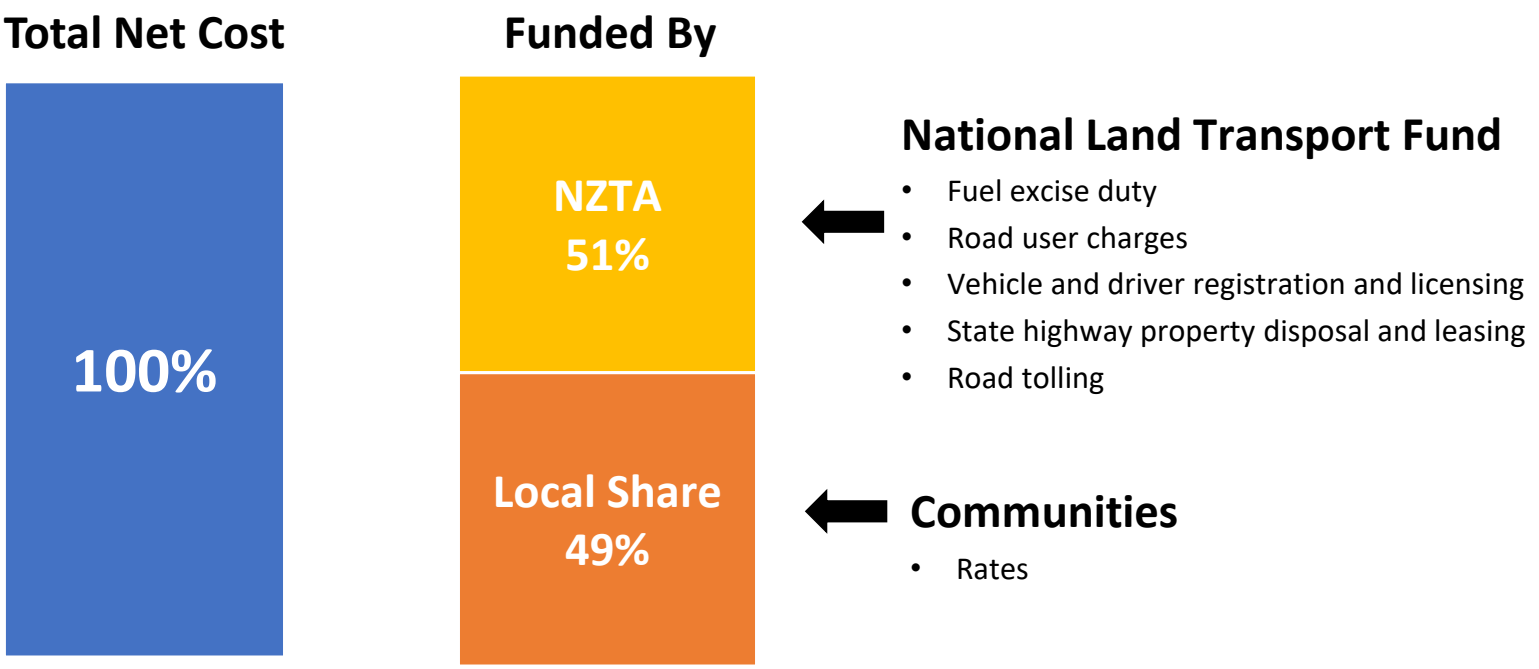
Total NZTA subsidy = $26.7M

Targetted rates (all) = $22M

General rates and UAGC = $2.2M

TOTAL = $61.2M

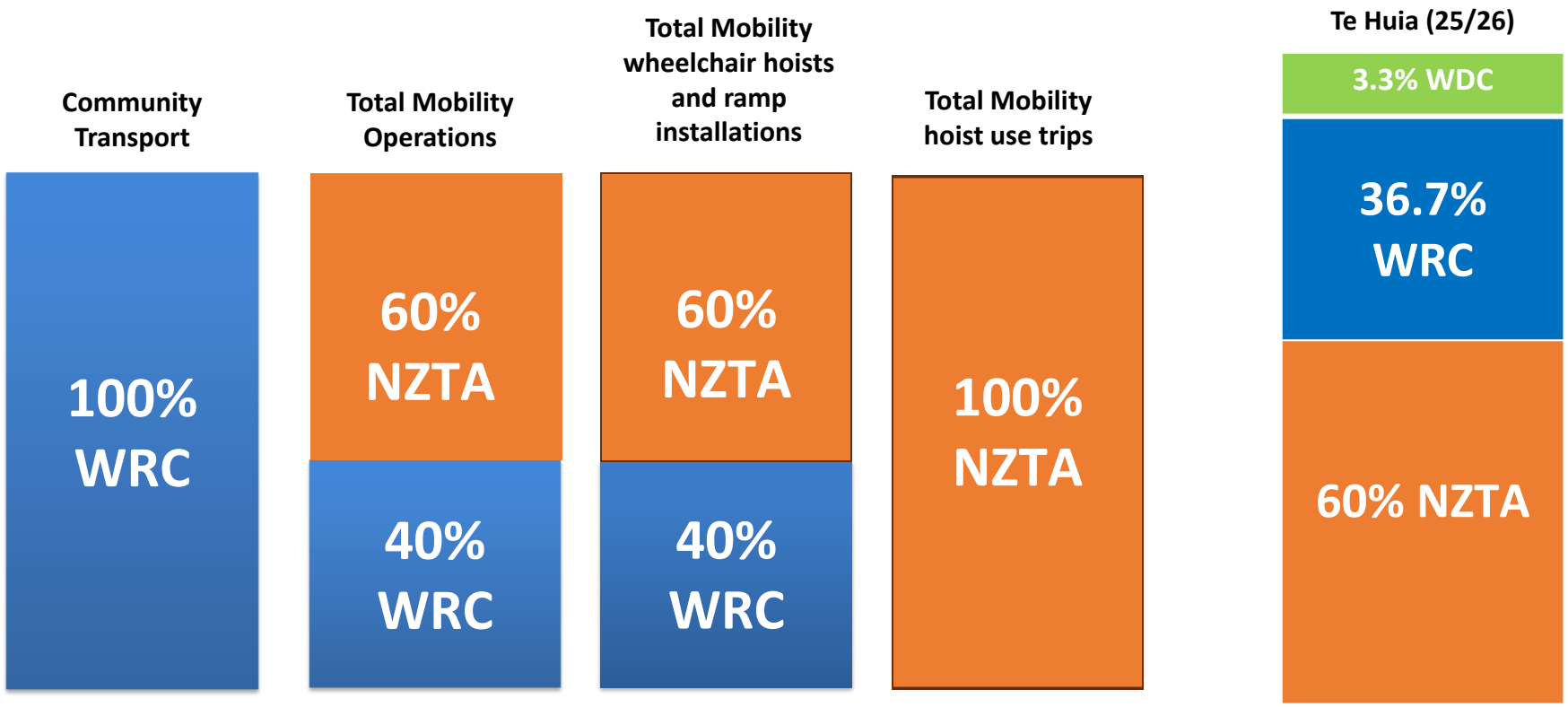
How are WRC transport functions funded?



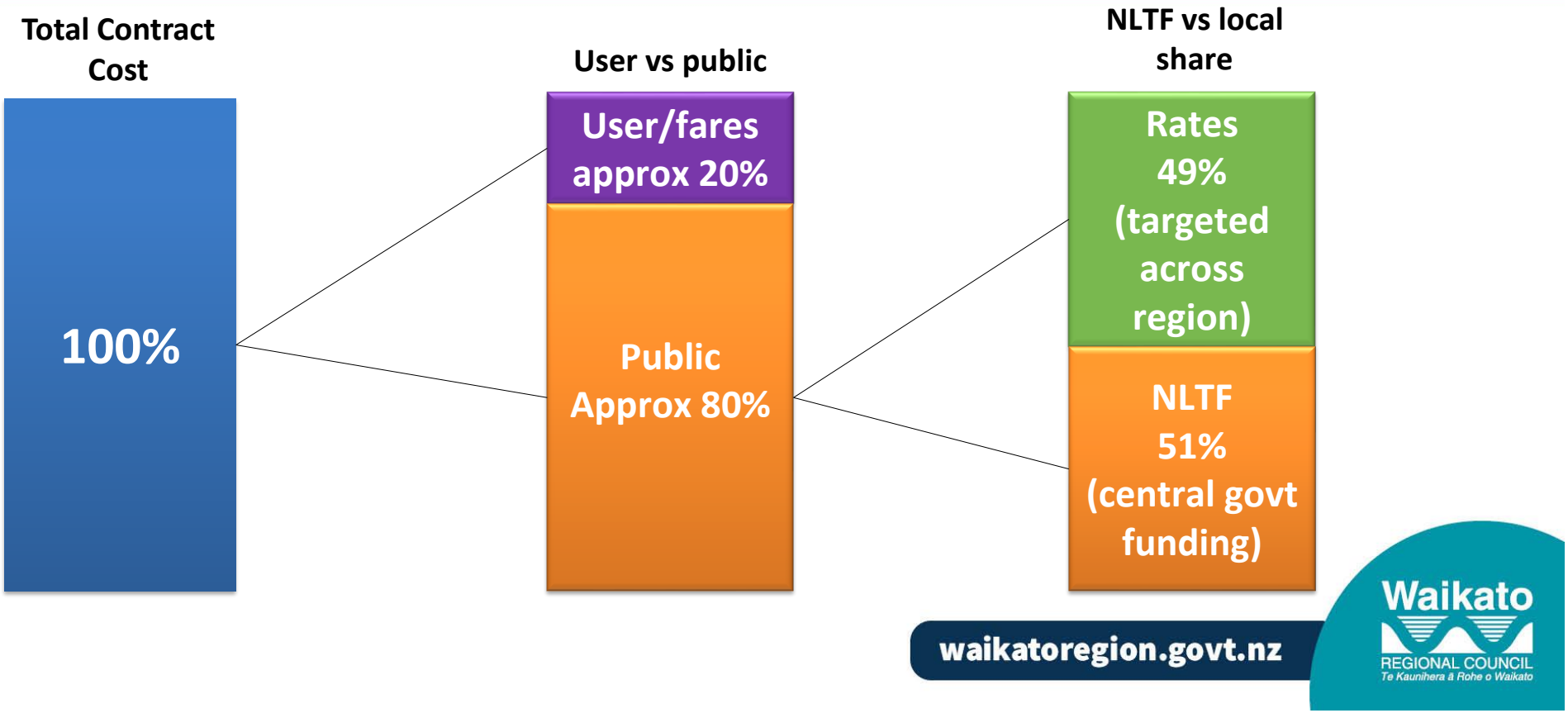
Funding Assistance Rate (FAR) is the funding contribution from NZTA to an approved organisation for a land transport activity.

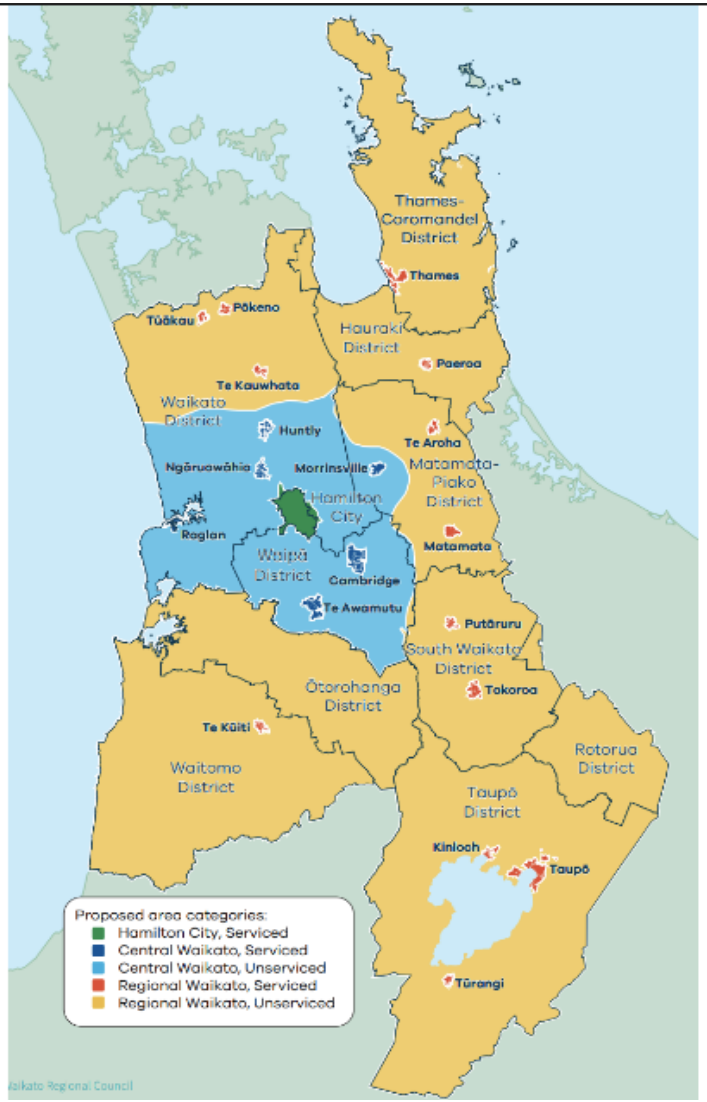
Funding Assistance Rates (2024-27)

Other than bus



Public Transport Funding – bus





Regional Public Transport Rating – targeted rate - from 1 July 2025

Area	Category	Public transport access
Hamilton	Serviced	Almost all properties in Hamilton have access to bus services and often have several choices. Total Mobility and Community Transport options are also available for these properties.
Central Waikato	Serviced	Urban parts of this area are serviced by at least one public bus route, including direct links to Hamilton. For example, Cambride, Huntly and Te Awamutu. Total Mobility and Community Transport options are also available for these properties.
Central Waikato	Unserviced	Rural parts of this area are not directly serviced by public bus routes. Total Mobility and Community Transport options are available for these properties.
Regional Waikato	Serviced	Urban parts of this area are serviced by a public bus route. For example, Thames-Coromandel, Tokoroa and Taupō: Total Mobility and Community Transport options are also available for these properties.
Regional Waikato	Unserviced	Rural zones in this area are not serviced by public bus routes. Total Mobility and Community Transport options are available for these properties.

Private Share Targets – NZTA approved

PTA Region	Private share 2023/24 Actual	Agreed private share 2024/25	Actual private share 2024/25	Agreed private share 2025/26	Agreed private share 2026/27
Waikato	9.9%	13.3%	15.2%	15.6%	18.4%

Private share is the proportion of costs funded by private revenue sources such as fares and advertising.

Private share can be increased by:

- Patronage growth
- Network optimisation
- Improved procurement practices
- Fares and pricing policy
- Developing 3rd party revenue streams

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Waikato REGIONAL COUNCIL Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Partnership delivery

PT Services

Waikato Regional Council – Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

- Network planning
- Management of network operations
- Contract management and procurement
- Network monitoring, analysis, reporting
- Customer service
- Marketing

Contracted Service Providers

- Drivers
- Vehicles
- Day to day service delivery
- Maintenance

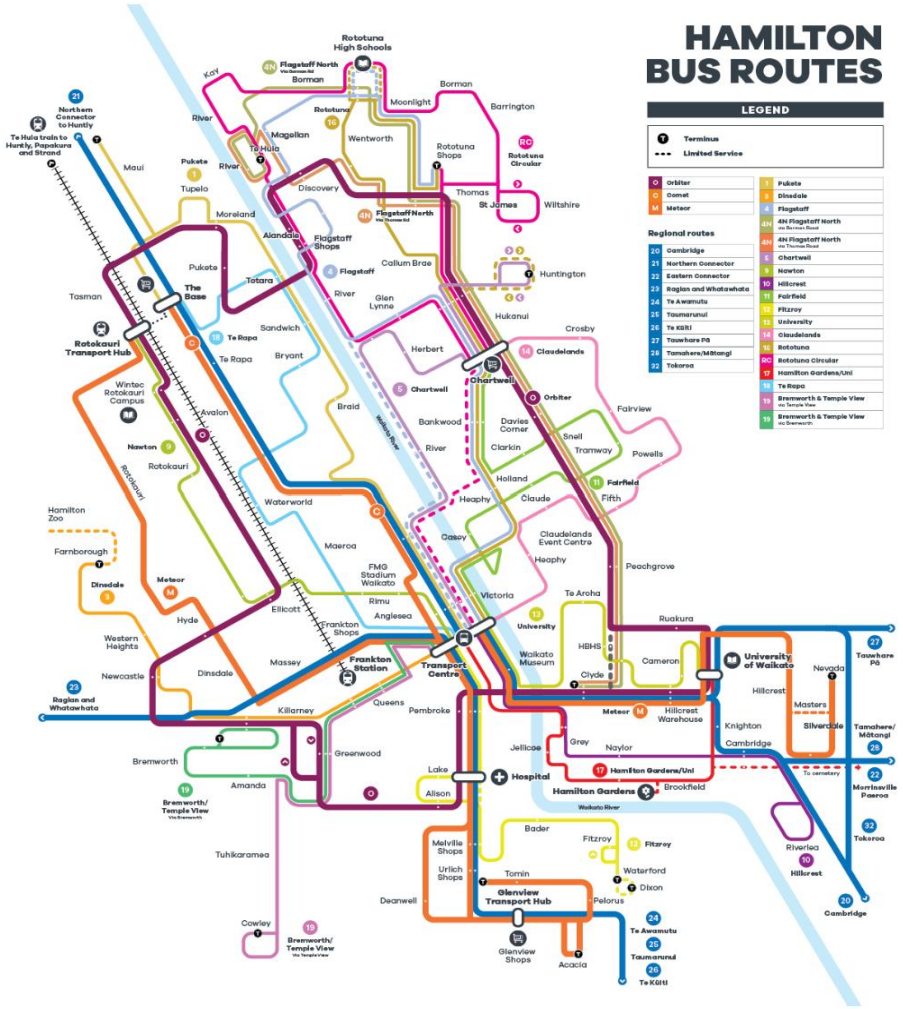
K/NET/C moving people; tranzit coachlines; KiwiRail; Thames Taxis Ltd

PT Infrastructure

NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi; Hamilton City Council – Te kaunihera o Kirikiriroa; Hauraki District Council; te kaunihera ā-rohe o matamata-piako district council; Te Kaunihera ā-rohe o Ōtorohanga District Council; Waikato District Council – Te Kaunihera aa Takiwaa o Waikato; Waipā District Council; Waitomo District Council; South Waikato District Council; Great Lake Taupō – Taupō District Council; Thames Coromandel District Council

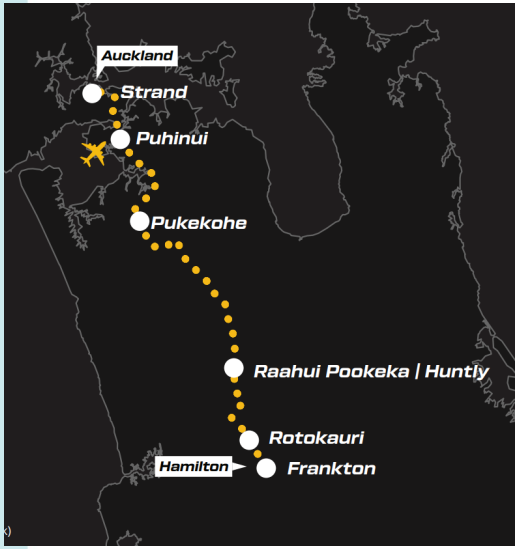
Urban Public Transport

- O Orbiter
- C Comet
- 1 Pukete
- 3 Dinsdale
- 4 Flagstaff
- 5 Chartwell
- 9 Nawton
- 10 Hillcrest
- 11 Fairfield
- 12 Fitzroy
- 13 University
- 14 Claudelands
- M Meteor
- 16 Rototuna
- 17 Hamilton Gardens Uni
- 18 Te Rapa
- 19 Bremworth/Temple View
- O Orbiter
- C Comet
- M Meteor
- 4N Flagstaff North
- RC Rototuna Circular



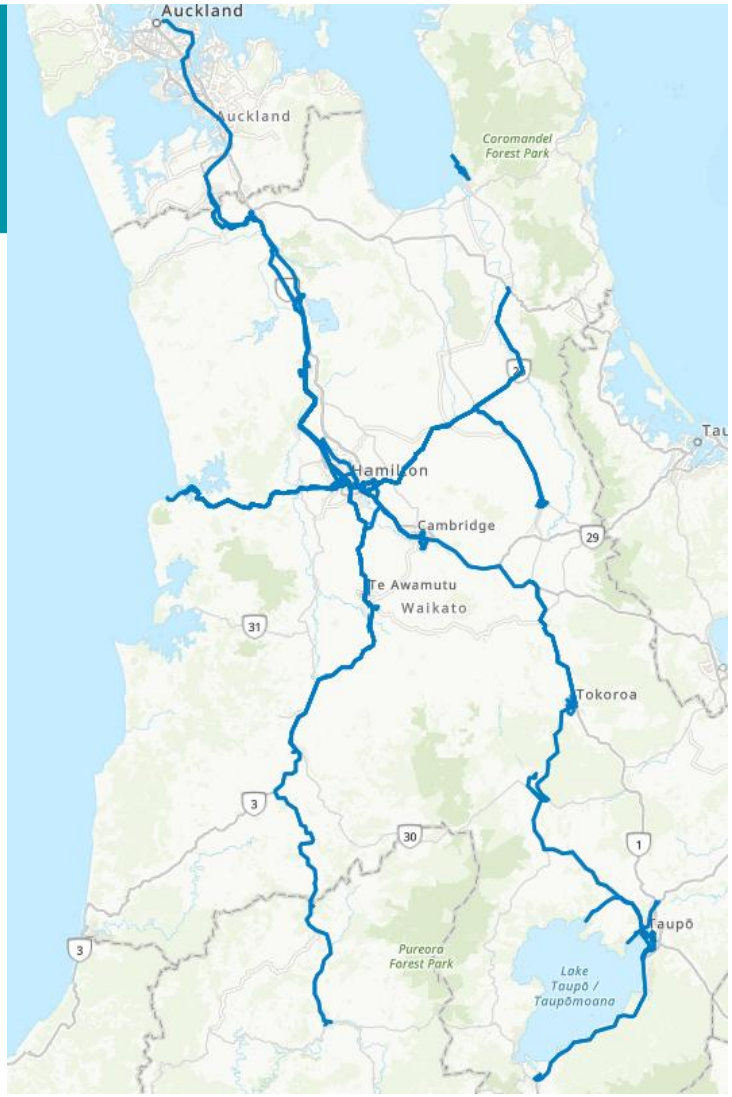
Regional Public Transport

Te Huia inter-regional rail



Regional bus routes

- 20 Cambridge
- 21 Northern Connector
- 22 Eastern Connector
- 23 Raglan
- 24 Te Awamutu
- 25 Taumarunui
- 26 Te Kūiti Connector
- 27 Tauwhare Pā
- 28 Tamahere/Mātangi
- 30 South Waikato Connector - Tokoroa Circuit
- 31 South Waikato Connector - District Connector
- 32 Tokoroa Connector
- 33 Taupō Connector
- 34 C2T - Acacia Bay to Taupō
- 35 C2T - Kinloch to Taupō
- 36 C2T - Tūrangi to Taupō
- 37 C2T - Tokoroa to Taupō
- 38 C2T - Wairakei to Taupō
- 44 Pōkeno to Pukekohe
- 70 Thames Connector



1 Patronage

2025 Q4

Definition: *How many trips are taken on public transportation?*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

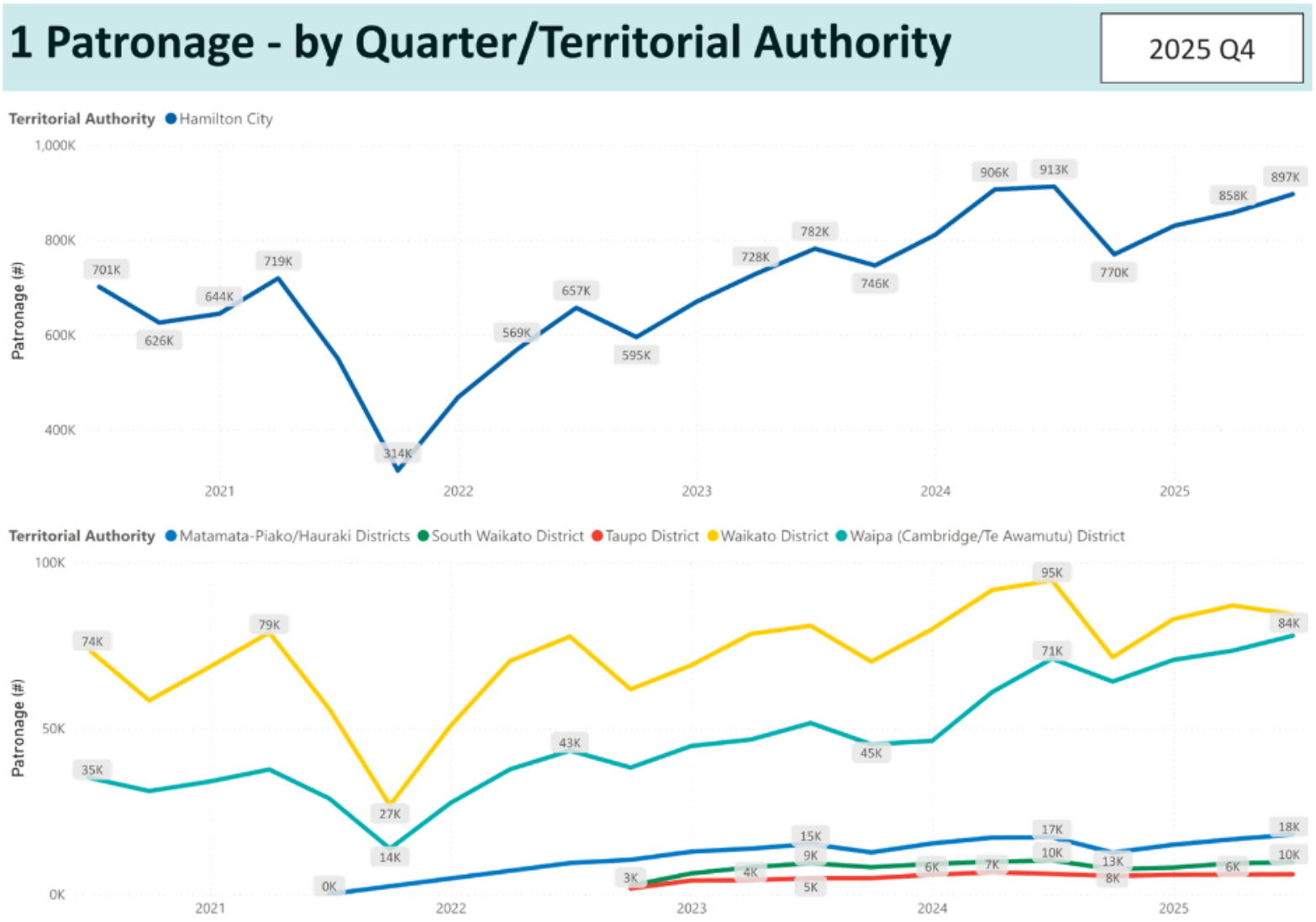
943,506
Patronage (#)

▲ **1.38%**
Patronage Change (%)

Unit	Patronage (#)	Change (%)
Hamilton East (Unit 2)	404,176	-0.25%
Hamilton West (Unit 1)	373,453	2.48%
Waipa (Unit 6A)	68,902	7.53%
Huntly (Unit 3)	43,798	-0.96%
Raglan (Unit 5)	16,921	-8.44%
Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4)	14,158	12.50%
Pokeno - Pukekohe (Unit 3A)	9,508	9.30%
South Waikato (Unit 7)	7,549	-0.03%
Taupo (Unit 9)	5,041	-7.96%

Ticket Group	Patronage (#)	Change (%)
Adult	406,648	-4.64%
Youth	162,741	447.77%
Senior	137,760	6.92%
Accessibility	107,612	9.71%
Tertiary	78,178	36.52%
Child	49,543	-73.89%
Other	1,024	67.59%

***Note:** Te Huia, Thames Connector (70) and Taumarunui Hospital Service (25) are excluded. Te Huia is reported elsewhere and Thames Connector/Taumarunui Hospital Service do not have standard ticketing machines and are reported elsewhere.*


1 Patronage - by Quarter/Territorial Authority
2025 Q4
Territorial Authority Hamilton City
Patronage (#)
1,000K
800K
600K
400K
701K
626K
644K
719K
314K
569K
657K
595K
728K
782K
746K
906K
913K
770K
858K
897K
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025
Territorial Authority Matamata-Piako/Hauraki Districts South Waikato District Taupo District Waikato District Waipa (Cambridge/Te Awamutu) District
Patronage (#)
100K
50K
0K
74K
79K
27K
35K
14K
0K
43K
45K
71K
95K
84K
3K
4K
5K
15K
9K
6K
7K
17K
10K
13K
8K
6K
18K
10K
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025

Community Transport

Snapshot of community transport

18 providers
Across the network*

60,678 volunteer hours
(17% increase from previous year)

$1,516,950 labour equivalent

51,464 trips taken
(117% increase from previous year)

2,980 trips by wheelchair users
(169% increase from previous year)

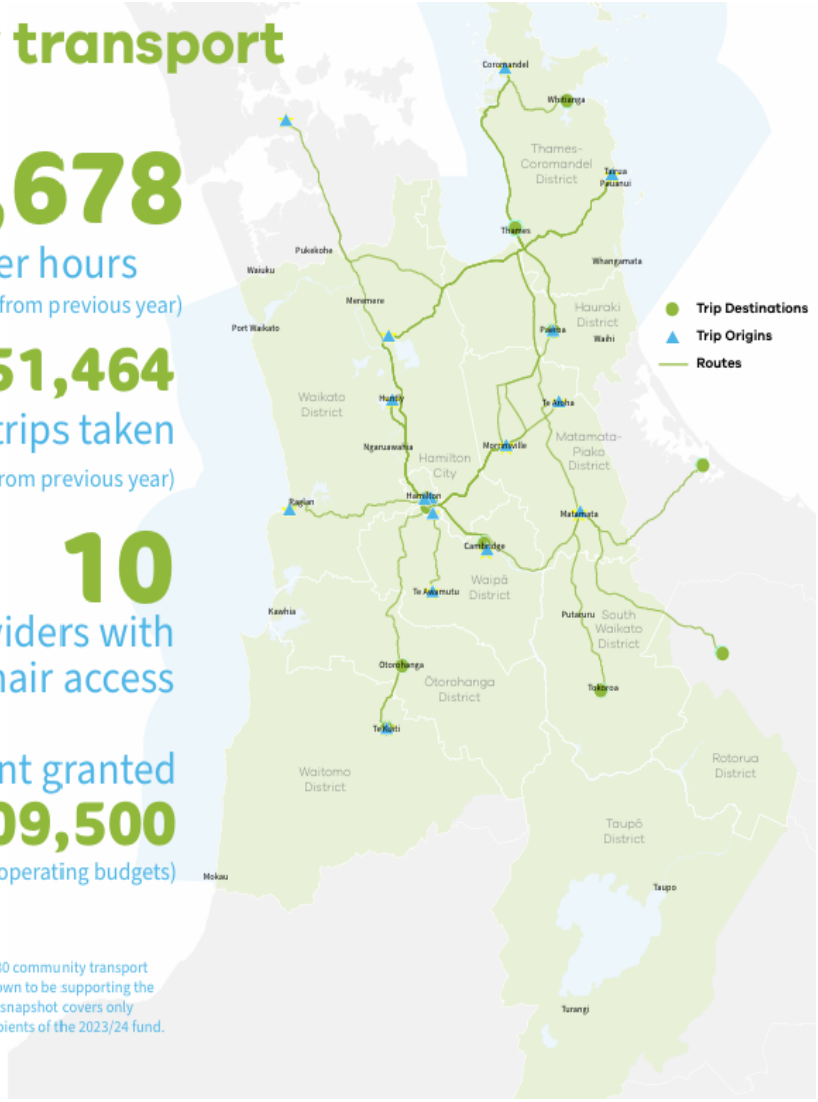
10 providers with wheelchair access

Total operating budget **$1,239,686**

Amount granted **$209,500**
(17% of total operating budgets)

1,165,614km distance travelled
(36% increase from previous year)

*Of the over 30 community transport providers known to be supporting the Waikato, this snapshot covers only those 18 recipients of the 2023/24 fund.



3 Community Transport Accountability Reporting FY2023

Total Mobility

- Operates across Hamilton City and Waikato, Waipa, Matamata-Piako, Thames-Coromandel & Taupo Districts, plus the town of Tokoroa.

The maximum contribution per trip in:

- Hamilton is $22.50 (up to a maximum fare of $30)
- Taupō is $18.75 (up to a maximum fare of $25)
- Tokoroa is $11.25 (up to a maximum fare of $15)
- Waipā is $18.75 (up to a maximum fare of $25)
- Matamata-Piako is $60 (up to a maximum fare of $80)
- Thames-Coromandel is $22.50 (up to a maximum fare of $30)
- Waikato District is $75 (up to a maximum fare of $100)

Note: Waikato Regional Council will pay 75% of the fare up to a maximum specified above. Any additional fare must be paid in full by the user.

Restrictions to the Total Mobility scheme in the Waikato;

- Waikato Regional Council will not pay for waiting time.
- If you will be using a voucher issued in another region, it is essential that you advise the taxi driver or the taxi company when you book the service or before you get into the vehicle.
- We encourage you to advise the taxi company that you are a Total Mobility user when you book the service.
- It is essential that you hand the taxi driver your electronic Total Mobility card when you first get in the cab, before the trip can begin.

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Waikato REGIONAL COUNCIL Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

Public Transport value for money – 2024/25

- Spend = $45.8M
- 7 million km travelled over 39 routes
- Over 80,000 passengers took over 4 million journeys
- Included over 1 million journeys by children/youth, 500k journeys by retirees
- Plus Community Transport and Total Mobility

NZTA monetised benefits manual calculations:

Direct benefits	Indirect benefits
Road traffic reduction benefit = $12M	Increased accessibility
PT user benefit = $68M	Increased access to jobs (local economy contribution)
	Increased inclusivity
	Increased transport resilience
	Increased sustainability

6.2 DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Lorraine Cheyne, Manager – Transport Strategy & Delivery**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report updates the Regional Transport Committee (RTC) Public Transport Subcommittee on policy and legislative changes impacting the planning and operations of public transport in the Region.
2. The report also updates the RTC Public Transport Subcommittee on current workstreams of interest to elected members and the wider public.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. Changes in the policy and legislation that have occurred since the start of 2026 include:
   a. Local Government Reform proposal
   b. National Guidance on Public Transport Harm Reduction
4. Current workstreams of interest to elected members and communities across the region include:
   a. Hamilton and Regional Bus Contract Renewals
   b. Cambridge Connections
   c. National Ticketing Solution
   d. Bus Fares Review

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the *Director's Report* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

TAKE | ISSUE

Current legislative and policy changes impacting on WRC's regional land transport and public transport planning, management and operations

Local Government Reform

5. In November 2025 the Government released a draft proposal that outlines significant structural reform to the governance and delivery of regional functions across New Zealand. The proposal consists of two major steps. Step one removes elected regional councillors and replaces them with a Combined Territories Board (CTB) comprising the mayors of the region's territorial authorities, or alternatively one or more Crown Commissioners. Step two requires each CTB to develop a Regional Reorganisation Plan within two years, mapping all local government functions and proposing the most efficient future delivery arrangements.

6. It is noted that while the proposal is intended to reform the delivery functions of regional councils there is minimal specific consideration of Public Transport Authorities (PTAs) functions, and it is unclear how PT delivery efficiency would be achieved.

NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) consultation on harm reduction

7. Public transport plays a critical role in connecting people and remains one of the safest ways to travel. However, instances of serious harm on or near PT are increasingly making the news. While rare, serious harm incidents on or near public transport can have a significant impact and reduce people's willingness to use public transport generally.

8. In January NZTA initiated sector consultation on two draft documents aimed at improving public transport safety. The first is *Public Transport Harm Reduction Guidance* and the second is *Guidance and Requirements for Public Transport Safety and Security Monitoring and Reporting*.

9. The draft *Public Transport Harm Reduction Guidance* outlines a nationally consistent, while locally responsive approach to preventing, managing, and monitoring harmful interaction. The draft Harm Prevention Guidance primarily promotes the development and use of Regional Public Transport Safety Plans. NZTA approval or endorsement is not required for regional SIPs. In essence, PTAs would prepare SIPs to define and prioritise evidence-based improvement initiatives, informed by engagement with their key stakeholders.

10. The Guidance also describes and defines and public transport safety intervention toolkit, which ranges from the roles and relationships that exist in public transport operations and management, to information and communication, to place-based (infrastructure) interventions, such as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) at public transport hubs, stations and stops.

11. The *Draft Guidance and Requirements for Public Transport Safety and Security Monitoring and Reporting* is essentially intended to be a nationally consistent framework for monitoring and reporting safety and security events in public transport environments. This will enable NZTA to collate and report data on actual and perceived PT safety and security for ministers and the public.

12. Regional Council Transport staff contributed to the research undertaken to develop the draft Guidance and are reviewing the completed draft material. At the time of writing this update Regional Council was preparing feedback on the draft Guidance.

Current workstreams of interest to elected members

Hamilton & Regional Bus Contract Renewals

13. A number of bus service contracts, covering Hamilton, North Waikato, Raglan, Eastern Waikato and Thames-Hauraki, are due to expire between late 2027 and mid-2028. Public Transport Bus Contracts are awarded for a period of nine years and planning for this renewal of contracts started in 2024 and included more recently the outcome of public consultation events with affected communities on new network designs. This feedback is available on the WRC website: Future bus services for the Waikato region | Your Voice Matters Waikato

14. The scope of services to be procured were agreed by Waikato Regional Council in August 2025 (report was provided to the Future Proof PT Sub-Committee ahead of that decision). Since then, work has focussed on the procurement of new contracts. A market engagement exercise has recently been concluded and is informing the procurement work. An update

was provided to WRC's Transport Committee and the report can be found on Page 39 of Agenda of WRC Transport Committee Meeting - Tuesday, 17 February 2026 - Core Share.

15. Although timelines are tight to meet the timeline of going to market in late March, work is progressing well. Decisions on contract award are expected to be made by WRC around August 2026.

Cambridge Connections

16. Waipā District Council is progressing its Cambridge Connections for a 30-year transport strategy for the town. Waikato Regional Council is supporting this work, with staff undertaking a Cambridge Bus Local Service Study.

17. The Bus Study assesses options for introducing a local public transport service within Cambridge to complement the existing regional connection to Hamilton. It aims to identify a preferred local service model that improves access to key destinations within Cambridge and Leamington and support future growth.

18. The first technical report, Technical Report 1 – *Cambridge Local Service Assessment*, has been completed. It includes a review of growth and travel demand, an assessment of existing services, and a review of potential service models including fixed-route, on-demand and hybrid approaches.

19. The next phase of work will focus on refinement of a short-list of options and identification of a preferred option for implementation. This will include high-level costing of the short-list options, estimates of potential patronage, and consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each option.

National Ticketing Solutions Project Update

20. Following an independent review undertaken in mid-2025, NZTA has refreshed the governance arrangements for the National Ticketing Solution (NTS) project. From January 2026, the Governance Group has been replaced with a new national Steering Committee which reports to a CEO Mobility & Payments Oversight Group.

21. With the change, Waikato Regional Council has taken on two new roles, both supporting the region's role as a member of the BeeCard ticketing system. Firstly, the Director of Regional Transport Connections has replaced his Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BoPRC) equivalent on the Steering Committee representing the 10 BeeCard regions from January 2026. Second, the Waikato Regional CEO has replaced the BOPRC equivalent on the CEO Mobility & Payments Oversight Group.

22. It is anticipated that the revised NTS programme and regional roll-out schedule will be confirmed shortly and this will be communicated to PTAs.

Bus Fares Review

23. The Waikato Regional Council has initiated a Public Transport Fares Review. The purpose of the review is to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of the region's public transport fare and tariff structure. The review will support the development of a regional approach for fare setting to inform the development of the next Regional Public Passenger Transport Plan (RPTP).

24. A key objective for reviewing the fare policy is to balance financial sustainability, patronage growth, and equitable access, while ensuring alignment with national policy settings. This includes how to achieve private share revenue targets, and compatibility with NTS / Motu Move.

25. The scope includes a review of fare structures, concessions, fare capping and zonal arrangements, and considers opportunities to simplify the existing system while supporting long-term network and customer outcomes.

26. The first technical deliverable, an Issues and Options Report, has now been completed. This report provides detailed evidence base and identifies key issues with the current fare system, alongside a comprehensive long list of potential fare and tariff options. These options have been developed to respond to the identified issues and objectives of the review and represent a wide range of potential interventions. The project is currently at the long-list stage, and no decisions have been made on preferred options at this point.

27. The next phase of the project will involve two elected member workshops including one with this Subcommittee, the other with the Waikato Regional Council Transport Committee, with dates to be confirmed.

28. At this stage, it is anticipated that any fare changes would align with the planned rollout of the National Ticketing Solution in late 2027.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

29. The legislative, policy and structural changes outlined in this report, including the reorganisation of key central government officials with whom we engage and collaborate, are collectively the biggest change to the local government transport operating environment in a generation. These will likely impact on the work of the Subcommittee in this triennium.

30. The next steps will be reporting back on policy and projects updates to the Subcommittee, as required.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.3 PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONNECT-2-TAUPO TRIAL SERVICE

Rā | Date:	**23 February 2026**
Kaituhi | Author:	**Katherine Simpson, Team Leader - Transport Planning**
Kaituku | Authoriser:	**Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**
Mana whakatau | Delegation Status:	**Enter Delegation Status**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the Regional Transport Committee Public Transport Subcommittee's (RTC PTSC) endorsement to implement the proposed service changes to the Connect-2-Taupō bus network, following completion of the 2025 service review and subsequent public consultation. The proposed changes are intended to address immediate operational pressures, improve capacity and reliability on high-demand routes, and ensure more efficient use of the existing fleet across the network. Endorsement is sought to proceed with these changes for implementation as part of the May 2026 network update.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. This report seeks the Subcommittee's endorsement to implement a package of service changes to the Connect-2-Taupō network that address immediate capacity and reliability constraints while remaining within existing operating budgets.
3. The recommended changes increase service provision on the highest-demand routes (Tūrangi and Tokoroa/Mangakino) and rationalise services on lower-demand routes (Acacia Bay and Wairakei) to ensure more efficient and equitable use of the single available fleet.
4. These changes respond directly to the 2025 service review and community consultation, balancing strong user demand with unavoidable operational trade-offs such as reduced time in Taupō for the Turangi service and the inability to use a larger vehicle on the Tokoroa/Mangakino service.
5. Adoption of the proposed package will strengthen the performance of the trial network ahead of the 2026/27 funding decision and support future planning for broader improvements across the Taupō public transport system.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Proposed changes to the Connect-2-Taupo trial service* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.
2. That the RTC Public Transport Subcommittee endorses the proposed changes to the Connect-2-Taupō service for implementation in May 2026.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

6. The Connect-2-Taupō services were introduced in October 2022 following earlier community engagement that identified a preference for fixed-route transport options for Taupō District's rural and semi-rural communities. Five routes were established - Acacia Bay (#34), Kinloch (#35), Tūrangi (#36), Tokoroa/Mangakino (#37), and Wairakei (#38) - all operated by a single 12-seater shuttle allocated across different communities on different days of the week. This operating model has created inherent limitations in capacity, frequency, timetable flexibility, and on-time performance.

7. As the services are funded under Waka Kotahi's Low-Cost Low-Risk (LCLR) programme, the current trial period ends in 2026/27. Ahead of decisions on permanency, Waikato Regional Council undertook a comprehensive service review in 2025 (see **Attachment 1**), analysing patronage trends, timetable performance, ticket types, revenue, customer feedback, and operational constraints. The review found significant variation in demand across the network: Tūrangi and Tokoroa/Mangakino demonstrated strong sustained patronage and recurring capacity issues, whereas Acacia Bay, Kinloch, and Wairakei showed lower and less consistent usage despite receiving a greater number of weekly services in some cases.

8. The service review identified several structural challenges: (1) the 12-seater shuttle constrains patronage growth on high-demand routes; (2) reliance on a single vehicle forces trade-offs between communities and limits the ability to adjust timetables; and (3) current trip timings do not fully align with local needs, particularly for commuters and users requiring longer time in Taupō. Despite these challenges, overall patronage across the network grew by 8% in the 12 months to April 2025, indicating clear community reliance on the services.

9. As part of the mid-2025 review, three potential timetable and vehicle allocation options were developed with the review and timetable recommendation presented to RTC in June 2025 for endorsement to begin consultation. Consultation subsequently commenced in November 2025.

10. Feedback from 183 respondents highlighted strong support for improving capacity and increasing service days on high-demand routes, particularly Tūrangi and Tokoroa/Mangakino, while also acknowledging the need to rationalise services in lower-demand areas such as Acacia Bay and Wairakei. A number of suggested improvements - such as commuter-timed services, additional layover time in Taupō, weekday frequency increases, and upgrades to larger vehicles - were noted but are not deliverable within current fleet and funding constraints.

11. The final recommended package of service changes now brought to the Subcommittee for endorsement represents a balance between community preferences, operational feasibility, and available funding. These changes can be delivered within existing operating budgets as part of the May 2026 network update.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

<u>Problem definition and current constraints</u>

12. The Connect-2-Taupō (C2T) network is a trial service designed to connect dispersed communities to Taupō using a single shared fleet, which inevitably creates hard trade-offs between frequency, capacity, and timetable flexibility. Demand has strengthened on the longest corridors while several smaller routes remain lightly used, leading to systemic

reliability pressure and unmet need where growth is strongest. This section outlines those constraints and why a reallocation is required now to stabilise service delivery and protect the credibility of the trial.

13. The C2T network is currently operated by a single 12-seat shuttle that rotates across five routes on different days of the week. This model has reached its practical limits. High-demand routes (Tūrangi and Tokoroa/Mangakino) regularly experience capacity issues and do not have enough service days to meet the demonstrated and growing demand. Conversely, some lower-demand routes (Acacia Bay, Kinloch, Wairakei) receive more service provision than usage justifies. The result is a network that cannot fully meet community needs, suppresses potential growth on busy routes, and offers limited flexibility for timetable improvements or reliability enhancements.

14. A further operational constraint relates to the availability of a larger bus. The larger bus proposed to be used is not new fleet but is drawn from the existing Taupō Connector service, where it currently operates peak morning and afternoon commuter trips. As a result, the bus is only available for use on C2T services during the off-peak window between the morning and afternoon peaks. This significantly limits scheduling flexibility and constrains how early services can depart, how late they can return, and how much time can be provided in Taupō for long-distance routes. While the use of this bus provides valuable additional capacity where it is most needed, its restricted availability means timetable improvements must be carefully designed around these fixed operational boundaries.

15. A detailed service review completed in 2025 confirmed these constraints. It highlighted strong sustained patronage on the longest routes, capacity-related barriers to growth, and a mismatch between available fleet and customer expectations for more commuter-friendly trip times and longer layovers in Taupō. At the same time, overall patronage across the network grew by 8% in the past year, signalling the value of the service and the importance of ensuring the trial is positioned for success ahead of the 2026/27 funding decision.

16. Public consultation in late 2025 received 183 responses across all communities. Feedback clearly supported additional service days and increased capacity on the strongest routes and was generally accepting of targeted reductions on the lowest-demand routes as long as essential access was maintained.

What is proposed

17. The recommended package concentrates limited resources where they will have the greatest impact, while maintaining a minimum service level everywhere. It draws on the service review, operator input, and community feedback to deliver a deliverable set of timetable and fleet changes that improve access and capacity on busy routes, rationalise low-demand trips, and keep the overall programme within budget and operational bounds.

18. The recommended package of changes (see **Attachment 2**) balances consultation feedback, operational feasibility, and available resources. The changes focus on improving access where demand is strongest while maintaining a minimum level of service for all communities. They include:

    (a) Tūrangi (#36): increase to three return trips per week and operate all days with a larger bus to alleviate capacity constraints, along with implementing the refined timetable.

    (b) Tokoroa/Mangakino (#37): increase to three return trips per week by adding a Wednesday service, continue operating with the shuttle, and implement the revised timetable without diverting via Kinloch (which was proposed during consultation).

(c) Acacia Bay (#34): reduce from three to two return trips per week by removing the Wednesday service.

(d) Wairakei (#38): reduce from five to four return trips per week by removing Friday, align Tuesday's timing with other days and, operate two days with a larger bus and two with the shuttle.

(e) Kinloch (#35): retain one weekly return trip with a minor timing adjustment and do not divert the Tokoroa service via Kinloch until a larger vehicle becomes available.

19. These recommendations represent the most effective deliverable improvements within the constraints of a single shared fleet.

Trade-offs and mitigations

20. Because the fleet is finite, achieving more seats and more service days requires targeted reductions and some timetable compromises. This section explains the key trade-offs (time in town vs frequency/capacity; equity between communities vs network performance; vehicle size vs timetable feasibility) and sets out practical mitigations, monitoring, and triggers for adjustment post-implementation.

21. Time in Taupō vs. improved frequency and capacity: To enable more service days and, where possible, larger vehicles, the proposed timetable reduces layover time in Taupō on the Turangi service. While this may be inconvenient for some users, it addresses the two most critical issues raised - service availability and seating capacity. Staff will monitor impacts and explore opportunities to extend layovers if additional fleet time becomes available.

22. Community equity vs. whole-network efficiency: Service reductions in Acacia Bay and Wairakei free up vehicle time needed to increase frequency where demand is highest. Although these reductions may concern some residents, essential access is maintained and aligns with both usage patterns and community feedback. Staff will continue to monitor patronage and revisit frequency if demand increases.

23. Vehicle size vs. operational feasibility: A larger bus can be allocated to Tūrangi but not to Tokoroa/Mangakino due to timetable constrains and commitments for the bus on the Taupo Connector service. Maintaining the shuttle on Tokoroa ensures service reliability and enables the addition of Wednesday services without compromising other parts of the network.

24. Kinloch diversion vs. capacity protection: Diverting the Tokoroa route via Kinloch (an option that was considered during consultation) would risk displacing Tokoroa and Mangakino passengers on an already-full shuttle. This option is deferred until a larger vehicle can be allocated.

Cost and funding

25. The recommended changes result in an increased annual operating cost of approximately $38,924. This cost is within the existing approved operating budget for the contract. Implementation can occur as part of the May 2026 network update.

26. As the recommended service change is not withdrawing completely from any community, nor is it going to any new community or location, there is considered to be no rates implications as a result of any of the proposed changes.

Expected outcomes

27. The package is designed to produce immediate, measurable benefits where users feel them most: fewer "left behind" events, an extra service day on the busy corridors, and better

alignment between provision and actual demand. This section summarises the near-term improvements we expect to see in reliability, access, and utilisation.

28. These changes are anticipated to:

    (a) Improve reliability and reduce the likelihood of passengers being left behind on the longest and busiest routes.

    (b) Provide additional service days where communities clearly indicated they would use them.

    (c) Better align service levels with actual demand, improving the efficiency of the trial network.

    (d) Strengthen patronage, utilisation, and evidence to support decisions on the future of the service in 2026/27.

Future work still required

29. These changes are an interim step, not the end state. A fuller response - commuter-timed trips, improved layovers, further potential vehicle upsizing, and integration with the wider Taupō network - requires additional resources and further planning. This section signals the next tranche of work and dependencies that will inform future decisions as funding and fleet opportunities arise.

30. While the proposed package addresses immediate constraints, it does not resolve structural issues that will require further planning work. This includes:

    (a) Developing commuter-oriented timetables on most, if not all, routes (earlier arrivals and later returns).

    (b) Reviewing layover times in Taupō and options for providing longer town access, particularly on longer routes.

    (c) Reassessing Acacia Bay frequency and Kinloch connectivity if an additional vehicle becomes available.

    (d) Further work on vehicle strategy, including opportunities to upsize vehicles permanently on high-demand routes.

    (e) Undertaking a broader Taupō and South Waikato network review, including a diversion on the Taupō Connector service to the airport and whether the Tokoroa Connector could extend to Mangakino or support the Tokoroa-Taupō corridor.

31. This future planning is anticipated to occur alongside ongoing and early monitoring of patronage and customer experience following implementation.

TE URUTAI KI TE HURIHANGA ĀHUARANGI| ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

32. This decision will increase the ability of the Council or region to proactively respond to the impacts of climate change now or in the future.

33. Any public transport service has the ability to reduce the number of motor vehicles on the roads, thereby reducing emissions and assisting in Councils ability to proactively respond to climate change.

34. The decision is sensitive to higher emission scenarios or more rapid climate change.

TE WHAKAMAURU – TE WHAKAHEKE I NGĀ PĀNGA KI TE ĀHUARANGI | MITIGATION – REDUCING IMPACTS ON THE CLIMATE

35. This decision is likely to result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

TE HAUTŪ ĀHUARANGI | CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

36. This decision supports Council's climate leadership by strengthening access to public transport on high-demand corridors, helping reduce private vehicle use and associated emissions in the Taupō District and Waikato Region.

TE AROMATAWAI I TE HIRANGA | ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

TE HOROPAKI Ā-TURE | LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

37. The RLTP and the RPTP is prepared under the direction of the Land Transport Management Act 2003 (LTMA). The recommendations presented in this report are considered to meet the requirements of the LTMA

KŌWHIRINGA I MANAKOHIA | PREFERRED OPTION

38. That the Regional Transport Committee Public Transport Subcommittee endorses the proposed changes to the Connect-2-Taupō for implementation in May 2026 as outlined in **Attachment 2** and described above.

NGĀ WHAIWHAKAARO KAUPAPAHERE | POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

39. To the best of the writer's knowledge, this decision is not significantly inconsistent with, not is anticipated to have consequences that will be significantly inconsistent with any policy adopted by Council or any plan required by the LGA or any other enactment

TE TIRITI O WAITANGI | THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

40. The Committee is obligated under the LGA to recognise and respect the Crown's responsibility to take appropriate account of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and to maintain and improve opportunities for Māori to contribute to local government decision-making processes.

41. The Connect-2-Taupo service will provide equitable transport options that enable Māori to access locations and services in the Taupo District. Approval is sought to implemented changes to the services which will improve access on high-demand services.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

42. The recommended changes to the Connect-2-Taupō network represent a balanced and evidence-based response to the significant operational constraints currently limiting service performance. By reallocating resources toward the highest-demand routes, introducing additional service days, and deploying a larger vehicle where feasible, the proposed package

delivers meaningful improvements in accessibility, reliability, and capacity while remaining within existing funding.

43. Although some trade-offs are required - particularly for communities with lower demand - the changes ensure essential access is maintained and position the network for stronger utilisation and better evidence ahead of the 2026/27 funding decision. Endorsing these adjustments now will allow Council to continue strengthening public transport provision in the Taupō District while supporting future planning, fleet considerations, and broader network development.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **2025 Connect-2-Taupo Service Review (Doc #32202945)** ⇩
2. **2026 Connect-2-Taupo Survey Results and Proposed Service Changes (Doc #34688303)** ⇩

Connect-2-Taupo 2025 Service Review for bus routes #34, #35, #36, #37 and #38

In October 2022, after 2018 consultations showed older residents preferred a fixed route over demand-responsive service, five new 'Connect-2-Taupo' (C2T) bus routes were introduced in the Taupo District. These routes and their operating days are listed below:

1) Acacia Bay to Taupo (#34)
    a. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday
2) Kinloch to Taupo (#35)
    a. Wednesday
3) Turangi to Taupo (#36)
    a. Monday and Thursday
4) Tokoroa to Taupo (#37)
    a. Tuesday and Friday
5) Wairakei to Taupo (#38)
    a. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

The service is currently operated by one 12-seater shuttle that interchanges between the different routes throughout the day. **Table 1** below shows this schedule. Having one vehicle operate between five separate routes and communities efficiently and effectively can be difficult to manage and makes any timetable or route changes complicated.

Table 1. The current vehicle and route schedule

Monday	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Turangi	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8.30 - 9.25	9.35 - 10.20	10.45 - 12.35	13.30 - 14.15	14.45 - 15.40	15.50 - 17.40
Tuesday	Wairaki	Tokoroa	Wairaki	Tokoroa		
	7.00 - 7.45	8.00 - 11.14	12.15 - 13.00	13.15 - 16.34		
Wednesday	Kinloch	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Kinloch	Acacia Bay
	8.20 - 9.35	9.35 - 10.20	10.35 - 11.30	13.30 - 14.15	14.30 - 15.45	15.50 - 16.45
Thursday	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Turangi	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8.30 - 9.25	9.35 - 10.20	10.45 - 12.35	13.30 - 14.15	14.45 - 15.40	15.50 - 17.40
Friday	Wairaki	Tokoroa	Wairaki	Tokoroa		
	7.00 - 7.45	8.00 - 11.14	12.15 - 13.00	13.15 - 16.34		

Following community feedback and the upcoming decision by Waikato Regional Council (WRC) and New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) on the permanency of the C2T services, a review is needed to assess the service and, if needed, recommend service changes. This service review intends to review these services and provide recommendations on how the C2T services could operate more effectively and better meet the needs of the community.

Contents

1 Service Review

1.1 Patronage

Patronage for the five C2T routes can be seen in **figure 1** below. It is evident that the #37 (Mangakino/Tokoroa) and #36 (Turangi) routes have received the most passengers since the launch of the service with patronage on each service totalling 4,602 and 4,136 passengers respectively. The #38 Wairakei service has received 1,457 passengers. It is also clear that the #34 (Acacia Bay) and #35 (Kinloch) have had lower patronage at 311 and 142 passengers respectively since November 2022. Some months of the Kinloch service saw zero passengers use the service.

While the high or low patronage per route could be attributed to the number of trips each route receives per week, as we'll see in the "Schedule Trip Time" section later in this report, this is not necessarily fully reflective of passenger behaviour in this instance.

Between May '24 and April '25 patronage across all five services increased by 8% compared to the same 12 months the year before (May '23 and April '24). Growth per route over the last 12 months is as follows:

- (#34) Acacia Bay to Taupo 36%
- (#35) Kinloch to Taupo 31%
- (#36) Turangi to Taupo 7%
- (#37) Tokoroa to Taupo 9%
- (#38) Wairakei to Taupo 1%

Interestingly, the two lowest performing routes have had the highest percentage passenger growth over the past year. However, it should be noted that due to the service only being operated by a 12-seater shuttle, the ability to keep growing is capped at a certain point when the vehicle is unable to carry more passengers. So, while the highest two performing routes (Tokoroa and Turangi) have only 9% and 7% passenger growth, higher growth on these routes could be constrained by capacity limitations (discussed in more detail later). Curiously, the Wairakei service has the lowest patronage growth at 1% while having the most services (and therefore most capacity) out of all the routes.

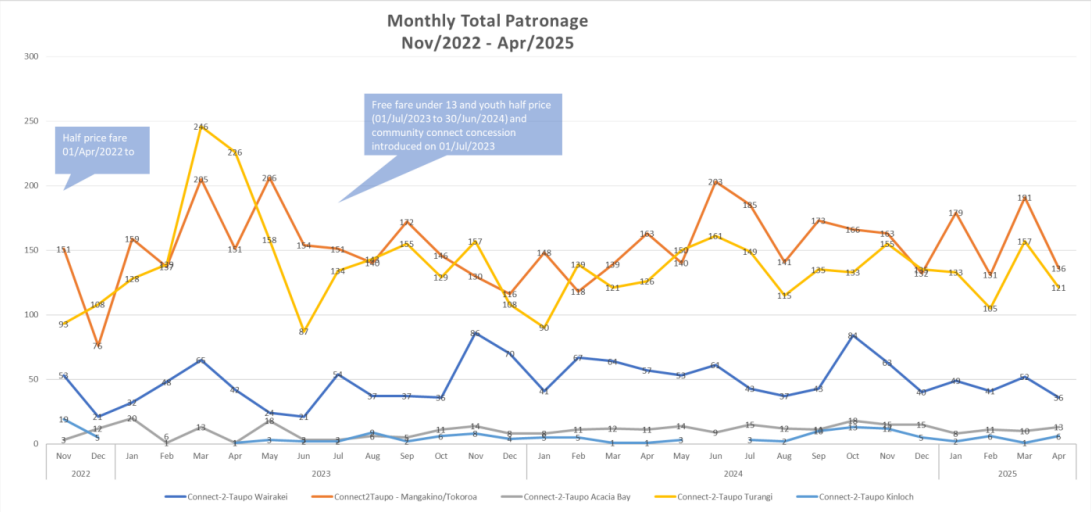


Figure 1. Patronage on the C2T services from November 2022 to April 2025

The relatively low growth in passenger numbers on the two highest-performing bus routes (#36 Turangi and #37 Tokoroa) suggests several key insights, particularly given the capacity constraints of the 12-seater shuttle:

1. **Capacity Limitations Restrict Growth Potential**
   - Since the service operates with a small 12-seater shuttle, the number of passengers may not accurately reflect true demand—potential riders may be unable to board due to full capacity at peak times (which has been feedback we have received from the community).
   - The limited seats could be capping potential growth, meaning demand may be much higher than what the data suggests.
2. **Consistently High Demand Rather than Expanding Ridership**
   - The routes are already well-utilized, meaning the percentage increase may be low not because demand is stagnant, but because it was already high in previous years. The system may be operating at or near maximum capacity, preventing significant increases in patronage numbers.
3. **Need for Larger Vehicles or More Frequent Services**
   - If demand is exceeding available seating, expanding fleet size (e.g., larger buses) or increasing frequency could unlock greater ridership growth.
4. **Minimal Expansion of Passenger Base**
   - If growth is limited despite high-performing routes, it could indicate stable but not significantly expanding ridership.
   - This suggests the service is reliably serving its core passengers but may not be drawing in new users.
5. **Potential for Strategic Investments**
   - If ridership cannot grow due to shuttle constraints, this strengthens the case for investing in service improvements, such as larger buses or increased frequency.

1.2 Ticket Type

Figure 2 below shows the breakdown of passengers by ticket type per route since November 2022. Overall, adults make up most of the ticket users at 45.5%, then SuperGold at 33.6% and Community Connect at 14.5%. Senior tickets make up 2.9%, Child 2.3%, Youth 2.1% and Tertiary and Accessibility both at 0.1%. However, when looking at the split of the ticket types per route (**Figure 2**), then it is clear that there are significant differences between some of the routes. For example:

- The Wairakei (#38) route has the highest portion of Adult tickets at 60.5%, with SuperGold tickets only being 21.4% and Community Connect at 5.7%. Wairakei also has the highest percentage of Youth tickets at 5.2%.
- Turangi (#36) has the second highest percentage of SuperGold users at 48.1% with Adults falling around the overall average at 42.1%.
- Kinloch (#35) has the second highest percentage of Adult tickets at 49.3% with SuperGold sitting below the overall average at 26.8% and Community Connect being the second highest overall at 17.6%
- Acacia Bay (#34) has, by far, the highest percentage of Community Connect tickets at 41.5% and the lowest SuperGold users at only 12.2%. Adult tickets account for 42.6%.
- Tokoroa (#37) has the highest percentage of SuperGold users at 59.5% and the lowest Community Connect users at 1.9%. Adult users sit at 32.9%.

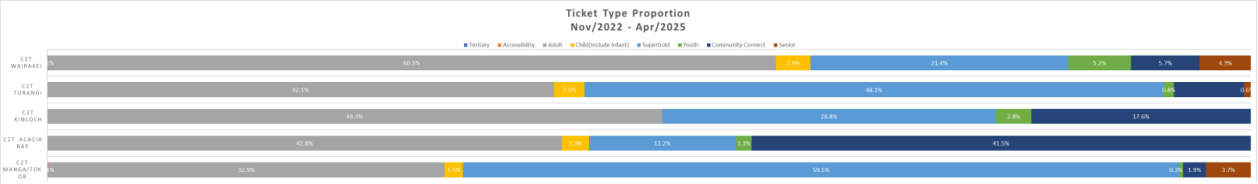


Figure 2. Patronage by Ticket Types over the past three Financial Years.

1.3 Schedule Trip Time

The patronage data per scheduled trip time is shown in the figures below. This data has been presented by Financial Year (FY) and so the 24/25 FY does not include the last two months of the 24/25 FY while the first eight months of the service (Nov '22 – June '23) have been excluded. Scheduled trip times represent the number of trips taken on any bus trips that start their route within that hour. So, for example, there is one trip from Taupo to Acacia Bay at 3:50pm and two trips from Acacia Bay to Taupo at 3:25pm. Patronage for all three of these trips will be reflected in the 3pm trip schedule time.

1.3.1 #34 Acacia Bay

Trips between Taupo and Acacia Bay are at the below times:

	To Acacia Bay from Taupo	To Taupo from Acacia Bay
Monday	8:30am 2:45pm	9:10am 3:25pm
Wednesday	10:35am 3:50pm	11:15am 4:30pm
Thursday	8:30am 2:45pm	9:10am 3:25pm

Figure 3 and **table 3** below shows the patronage per scheduled trip time on the #34 bus. Overall, the 9am, 2pm and 3pm trip times are the busiest. The remaining four trips (8am, 10am, 11am and 4pm) have very low patronage with only 5, 7, 5 and 3 passengers, in total, since June '23 respectively. Overall, the service has received 240 passengers, with the three busy trip times accounting for 92% of all passengers.

In the table above, the higher performing scheduled trip times have been highlighted in green while the poorer performing trip times have been highlighted in red. It is clear that Wednesday is the poorest performing travel day of the week despite the green 3:50pm, although, this has only been highlighted as overall the 3pm service time does relatively well but this could be attributed to the 3:25pm trips on Mondays and Thursdays. The red 8:30am times on Monday and Thursday is not surprisingly as travel demand would typically be from Acacia Bay to Taupo in the mornings for passengers to access services or work. And so, when considering service and efficiency changes, a possibility could be to remove the Wednesday trip due to its poor performance but retain the Monday and Thursday services.

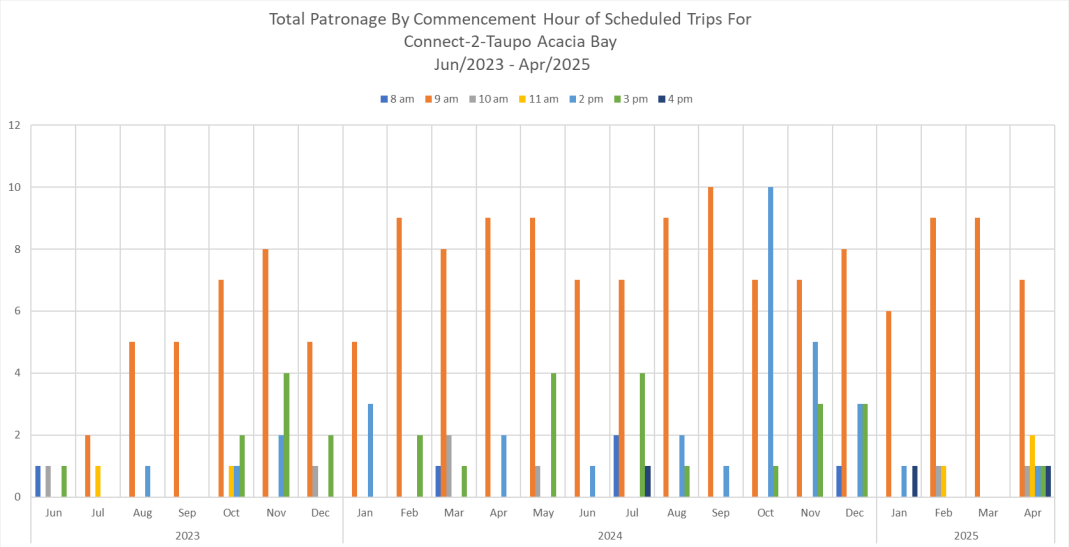


Figure 3. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #34 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

Table 2. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #34 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	8 am	9 am	10 am	11 am	2 pm	3 pm	4 pm	Grand Total
2023	1	32	2	2	4	9	0	**50**
2024	4	95	3	0	27	19	1	**149**
2025	0	31	2	3	2	1	2	**41**
Grand Total	**5**	**158**	**7**	**5**	**33**	**29**	**3**	**240**

1.3.2 #35 Kinloch

Trips between Taupo and Kinloch are at the below times:

	To Kinloch Bay from Taupo	To Taupo from Kinloch
Wednesday	8:20am 2:30pm	9:05am 3:15pm

Figure 4 and **table 4** below shows the patronage per scheduled trip time on the #35 bus. As there is only one return trip between Kinloch and Taupo a week, it is easier to access the performance of this service. This is evidently not a busy service with only having received 103 passengers since June '23. However, in context of the overall C2T service, this is performing better than the Wednesday trips to Acacia Bay.

Given the service operates only two return trips per week on the same day, the low patronage of 103 people since June 2023 could be rationalized by two key factors:

- Limited Frequency: With only two return trips per week, the service lacks the flexibility and convenience that regular commuters typically require.
- Fixed Schedule: Since both trips occur on the same day, rather than being spread across different days of the week, the service is only catering to a very niche demand—likely specific events, shopping, medical appointments or workers with predictable weekly schedules.

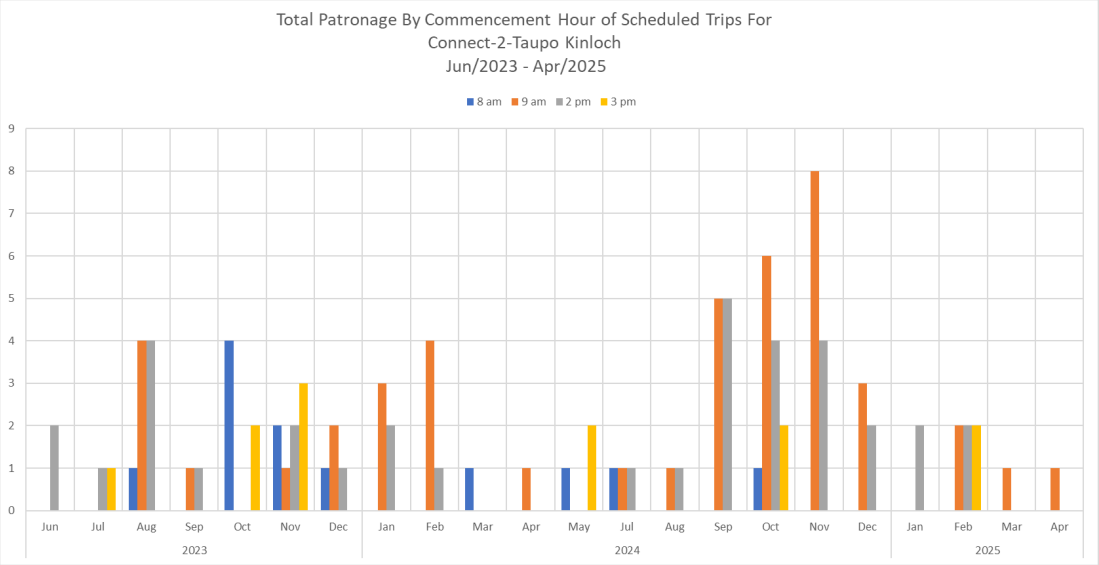


Figure 4. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #35 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

Table 3. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #35 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	8 am	9 am	2 pm	3 pm	Grand Total
2023	8	8	11	6	**33**
2024	4	32	20	4	**60**
2025	0	4	4	2	**10**
Grand Total	**12**	**44**	**35**	**12**	**103**

1.3.3 #36 Turangi

Trips between Taupo and Turangi are at the below times:

	To Turangi from Taupo	To Taupo from Turangi
Monday	10:45am 3:50pm	11:45am 4:50pm
Thursday	10:45am 3:50pm	11:45am 4:50pm

Figure 5 and **table 5** below shows the patronage per scheduled trip time on the #36 bus. Overall, the 11am and 3pm trip times are the busiest accounting for 77% of all patronage on this service. The service has received 2,977 passengers since June '23. WRC are aware that this service has reached capacity which is supported by the high demand for the service. Adding an additional service would likely be a recommendation.

You will note that there are 24 passengers having taken a 5pm trip in 2023. This was a previous timetable where subsequent timetable changes shifted that trip to the 4pm trip time.

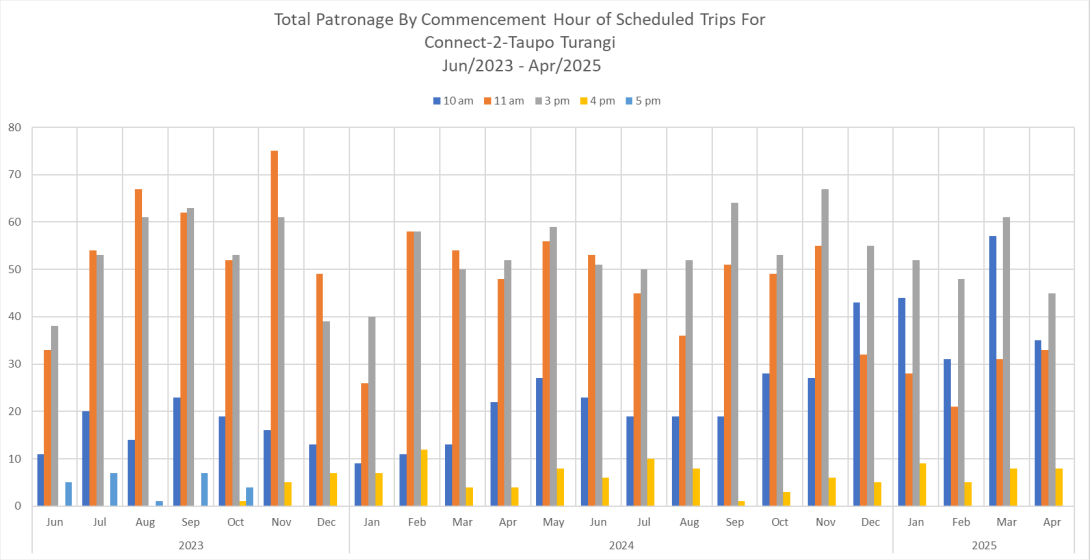


Figure 5. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #36 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

Table 4. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #36 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	10 am	11 am	3 pm	4 pm	5 pm	Grand Total
2023	116	392	368	13	24	**913**
2024	260	563	651	74	0	**1548**
2025	167	113	206	30	0	**516**
Grand Total	**543**	**1068**	**1225**	**117**	**24**	**2977**

1.3.4 #37 Tokoroa

Trips between Taupo and Tokoroa are at the below times:

	To Tokoroa from Taupo	To Taupo from Tokoroa
Tuesday	8:00am 1:15pm	9:40am 3:00pm
Friday	8:00am 1:15pm	9:40am 3:00pm

Figure 6 and **table 6** below shows the patronage per scheduled trip time on the #37 bus. Overall, all services are performing decently with only the 3pm trip standing out as the lowest performing trip time. The service has received 3,434 passengers - the highest performing service out of all C2T services. WRC are aware that this service has reached capacity (the bus is often full by the time it leaves Taupo and reaches Mangikino and so passengers in Mangakino aren't able to get on) which is supported by the high demand for the service. Adding an additional service would likely be a recommendation.

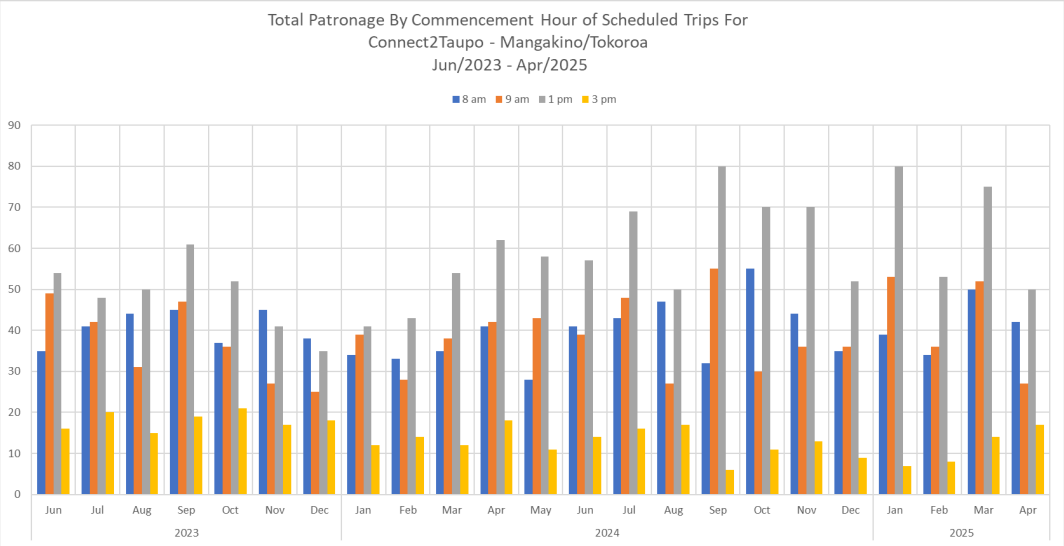


Figure 6. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #37 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

Table 5. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #37 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	8 am	9 am	1 pm	3 pm	Grand Total
2023	285	257	341	126	**1009**
2024	468	461	706	153	**1788**
2025	165	168	258	46	**637**
Grand Total	**918**	**886**	**1305**	**325**	**3434**

1.3.5 #38 Wairakei

Trips between Taupo and Wairakei are at the below times:

	To Wairakei from Taupo	To Taupo from Wairakei
Monday	9:35am 1:30pm	10:00am 1:55pm
Tuesday	7:00am 12:15pm	7:25am 12:40pm
Wednesday	9:35am	10:00am

	1:30pm	1:55pm
Thursday	9:35am 1:30pm	10:00am 1:55pm
Friday	7:00am 12:15pm	7:25am 12:40pm

Figure 7 and **table 7** below shows the patronage per scheduled trip time on the #38 bus. Overall, the 9am and 1pm trips are performing the best, with the 10am and 12pm trips performing modestly and the 7am performing the poorest. The service has had 1,151 passengers since June '23.

In the table above, the higher performing scheduled trip times have been highlighted in green while the poorer performing trip times have been highlighted in red and the modest trips in grey. It is clear that the Monday, Wednesday and Thursday trips perform better overall than the Tuesday and Friday trips. And so, when considering service and efficiency changes, a possibility could be to remove either the Tuesday or Friday service due to its poor performance (and allows the reallocation of the vehicle to another service with higher demand) but retain the Monday, Wednesday and Thursday services.

As discussed in section 1.1 above, Wairakei is also the poorest performing route in terms of annual passenger growth having only seen a 1% increase in patronage over the past 12 months.

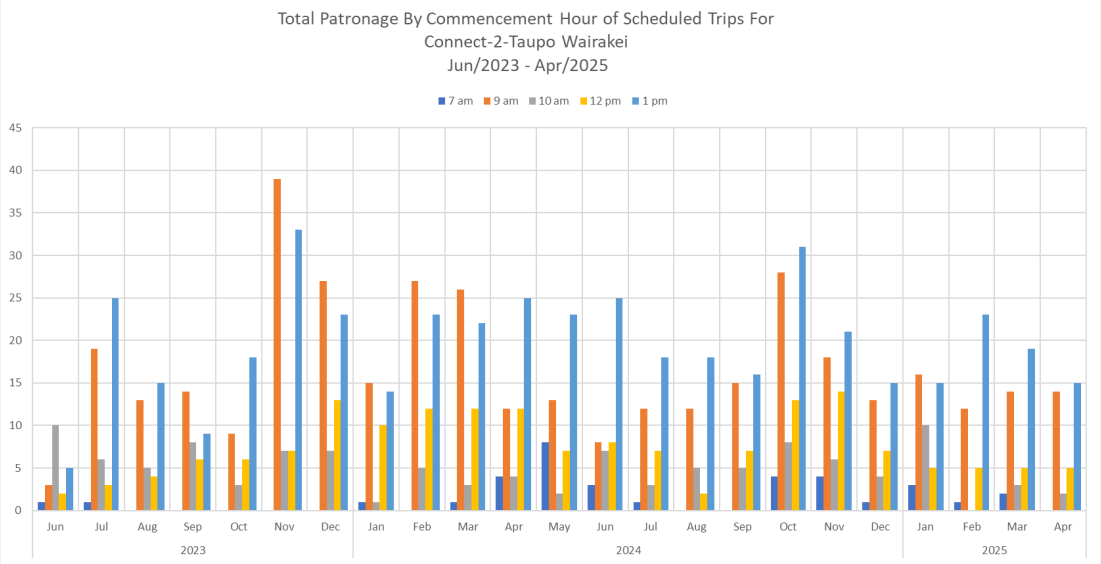


Figure 7. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #38 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

Table 6. Patronage data by Scheduled Trip time for route #38 for the 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	7 am	9 am	10 am	12 pm	1 pm	Grand Total
2023	2	124	46	41	128	**341**
2024	27	199	53	111	251	**641**
2025	6	56	15	20	72	**169**
Grand Total	**35**	**379**	**114**	**172**	**451**	**1151**

1.3.6 Summary of Findings

It is clear that some services are performing well with high patronage despite the limited return trips provided each week (#36 Turangi and #37 Tokoroa) suggesting that these services could be enhanced. On the other hand, there are other services which seem to possibly have more services than what may be

required (#38 Wairakei and #34 Acacia Bay). When looking at the number of trips per service and their overall patronage, we get an approximate patronage number per trip shown below. This reiterates the suggestion that #36 and #37 could warrant an additional return trip each week while #34 and #38 could have reduced services.

	Return Trips *to Taupo* per week	Overall patronage (June '23 - April '25)	Patronage per return trip (June '23 - April '25)
#34 Acacia Bay	3	240	80
#35 Kinloch	1	103	103
#36 Turangi	2	2977	1489
#37 Tokoroa	2	3434	1717
#38 Wairakei	5	1,151	230

Looking at the patronage data for each location, several insights emerge that can guide decisions to improve efficiency, especially given the constraint of a single vehicle managing all trips.

1. **Key Findings**
   a) **High-Patronage Locations:**
      - Tokoroa and Turangi stand out with the highest overall patronage (3,434 and 2,977, respectively). Their patronage per return trip is also the highest (1,717 and 1,489). This suggests strong demand in these areas.

   b) **Low-Patronage Locations:**
      - Kinloch (103 total patronage) and Acacia Bay (240 total patronage) have the lowest usage. Despite Kinloch having just one trip per week, the numbers remain low.
      - Wairakei, despite having five return trips, sees lower patronage (1,151 total), averaging 230 per trip. This requires an efficiency assessment or re-evaluation.

   c) **Trip Allocation vs. Demand:**
      - Wairakei receives more trips than Turangi and Tokoroa, but demand is significantly lower.
      - Kinloch's single weekly trip sees minimal usage, suggesting low interest.

2. **Recommendations for Efficiency Improvements**
   1. **Increase Frequency for High-Demand Locations:**
      - It is worth considering adding additional return trips for Tokoroa and Turangi, as their patronage suggests demand could support more services.
   2. **Reduce Frequency in Low-Demand Locations:**
      - Acacia Bay and Kinloch could see reduced service or reallocation of trips to more popular locations.
      - Wairakei, while not extremely low in patronage, could have some trips reassigned to Tokoroa or Turangi for better balance.
   3. **Optimize Scheduling:**
      - A review of trip days and times could ensure services align better with passenger needs.

1.4 Patronage by Stop

Onboarding and alighting patronage by stop on all five C2T routes is shown in **Figures 8** and **9** below. Overall, between January ‘23 and April ’25, there have been a higher number of onboarding passengers (7,524) as opposed to alighting passengers (6,117). However, onboarding figures are typically more reliable as alighting figures do not count passengers who paid with cash or passengers who forget to tag off with their BeeCard. Unsurprisingly, the most popular boarding and alighting stops are largely in locations which are closest to schools, key employment areas or town centres.

Figure 8.Onboarding Patronage by stop for all C2T services (January '23-April '25)

Figure 9. Alighting Patronage by stop for all C2T services (January '23-April '25)

1.5 Route Interchange

This section provides insight into passenger travel behaviour by identifying where passengers may transfer from one service to another. It is important to note that the below data only shows the travel behaviour of passengers who use their BeeCards and so more transfers could be happening if fares are paid in cash but are not able to be captured.

1.5.1 #34 Acacia Bay

Since June '23, 86.7% of all trips have not included any interchange from the #34 service to another service (**figure 10**). 8.7% of trips involved an interchange to route #34 and 4.6% of trips involved an interchange from route #34. However, in the last 12 months (May '24-April '25), 92.6% of all trips did not involve an interchange while 3.3% and 4.1% of trips did involve an interchange either to or from route #34 respectively.

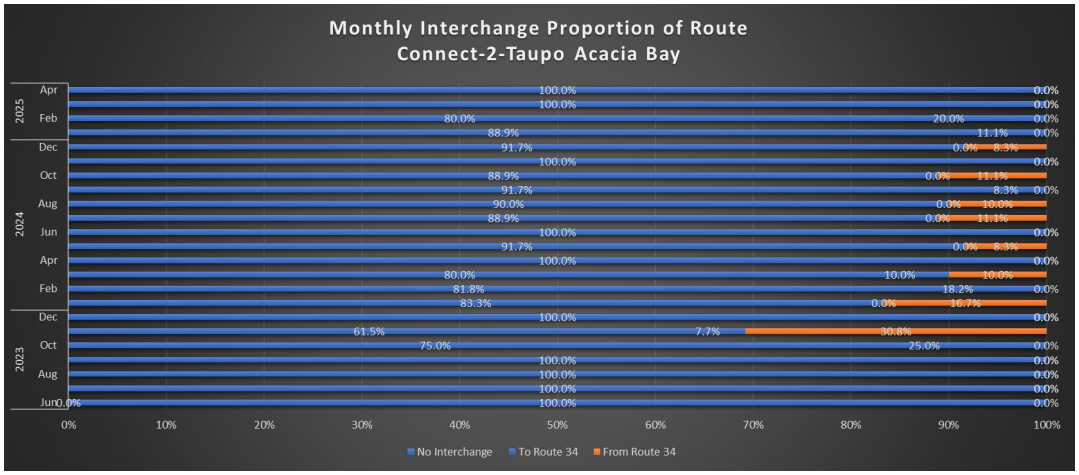


Figure 10. Passenger route interchanges June '23-April '25

Digging into the travel behaviour over the past 12 months, **table 7** below shows onto which services passengers are transferring to or from. Notably, there have been no interchanges from route #34 in 2025 and the only interchanges that occurred from the service in 2024 were to the C2T #36 Turangi service. Interchanges onto route #34 have come from service routes #36, #38 and #35, although these have been very low with only 4 transfers onto the service occurring over the past year.

Table 7. Passenger route interchanges May '24-April '25

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Total	2025 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	2025 Total
From Route 34														
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay -> Connect-2-Taupo Turangi	1		1	1		2		1	8					
No Interchange														
No Interchange	11	6	8	9	11	16	15	11	116	8	8	9	9	34
To Route 34														
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay									3	1	1			2
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay					1				1					
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay											1			1

1.5.2 #35 Kinloch

Since June ’23, 87% of all trips have not included any interchange from the #35 service with 13% having an interchange from the service (**figure 11**). However, in the last 12 months (May ’24-April ’25), 95% of all trips did not involve an interchange while 5% did involve an interchange from route #35.

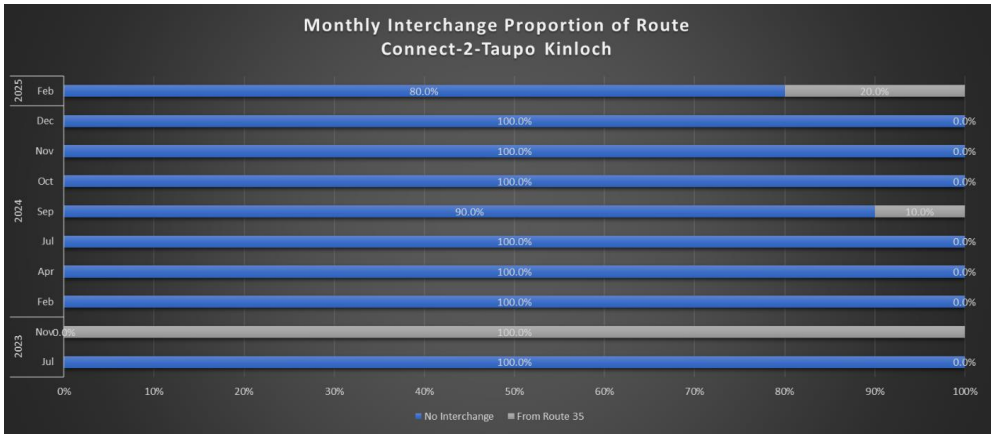


Figure 11. Passenger route interchanges June ’23-April ‘25

Digging into the travel behaviour over the past 12 months, **table 8** below shows onto which services passengers are transferring from. There have only been two transfers from the #35 service over the past 12 months, these being the C2T services #34 and #38.

Table 8. Passenger route interchanges May ’24-April ‘25

	Jul	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Total	2025 Feb	2025 Total
From Route 35								
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay							1	1
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch -> Taupo Connector								
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei		1				1		
No Interchange								
No Interchange	1	9	9	6	2	30	4	4

1.5.3 #36 Turangi

Since June ’23, 97.2% of all trips have not included any interchange from the #34 service to another service (**figure 12**). 2% of trips involved an interchange from route #36 and 0.8% of trips involved an interchange to route #36. However, in the last 12 months (May ’24-April ’25), 98.5% of all trips did not involve an interchange while 0.5% and 1% of trips did involve an interchange either from or to route #36 respectively.

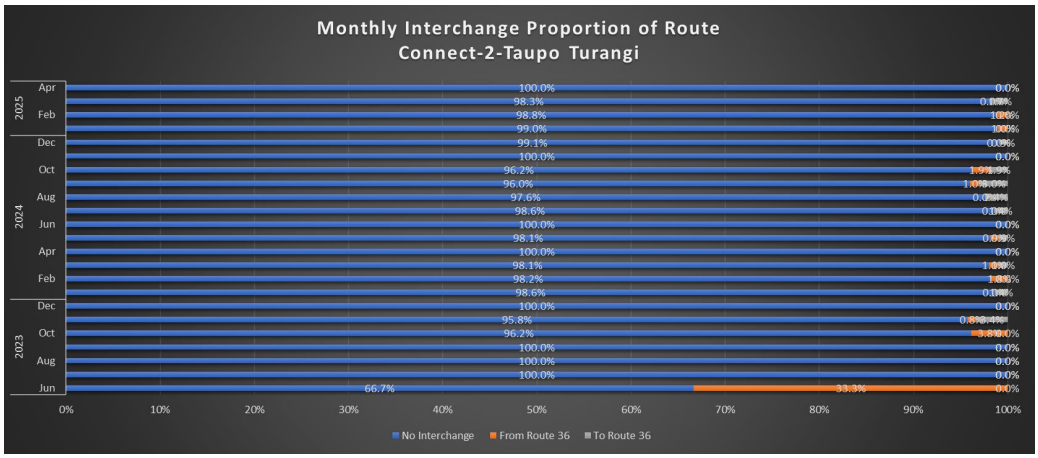


Figure 12. Passenger route interchanges June '23-April '25

Digging into the travel behaviour over the past 12 months, **table 9** below shows onto which services passengers are transferring to or from. Notably, there have only been two transfers either to or from the #36 service in 2025 and 18 in the past year. Interchanges both to and from route #36 have come from C2T service routes #34 and #38

Table 9. Passenger route interchanges May '24-April '25

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Total	2025 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	2025 Total
From Route 36														
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay									3	1	1			2
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei	1				1	2			4					
No Interchange														
No Interchange	106	98	68	80	96	102	123	106	1162	97	83	118	95	393
To Route 36														
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay -> Connect-2-Taupo Turangi	1		1	1		2		1	8					
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect-2-Taupo Turangi				1	3				4			2		2

1.5.4 #37 Tokoroa

Since June '23, 99.4% of all trips have not included any interchange from the #37 service to another service (**figure 13**). 0.3% of trips involved an interchange from route #37 and 0.2% of trips involved an interchange to route #37. These numbers are similar to the past 12 months (May '24-April '25) where 99.3% of all trips did not involve an interchange while 0.4% and 0.4% of trips did involve an interchange either from or to route #37 respectively.

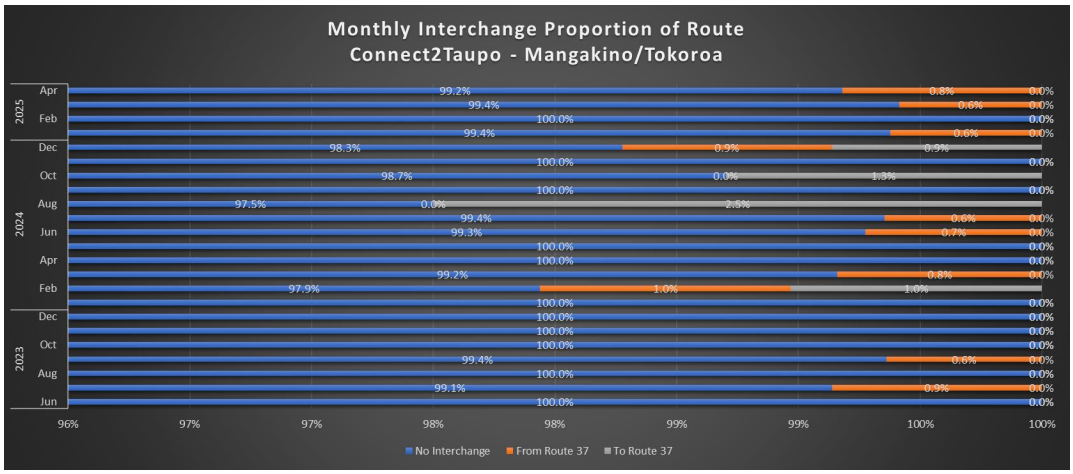


Figure 13. Passenger route interchanges June '23-April '25

Digging into the travel behaviour over the past 12 months, **table 10** below shows onto which services passengers are transferring to or from. Notably, there have been no transfers onto route #37 in 2025. Overall, there have only been 12 transfers either to or from the #37 service in the past year. Interchanges from route #37 have come from C2T service #38 and the #30 Tokoroa Circuit (not a C2T service). Interchanges to route #37 have come from the #30 Tokoroa Circuit (not a C2T service), #33 Taupo Connector (not a C2T service) and, C2T #38 service.

Table 10. Passenger route interchanges May '24-April '25

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Total	2025 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	2025 Total
No Interchange														
No Interchange	130	137	154	117	151	152	144	114	1551	160	119	170	121	570
From Route 37														
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa -> Tokoroa Circuit													1	1
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei		1	1					1	5	1		1		2
To Route 37														
Tokoroa Circuit -> Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa				1		2			4					
Taupo Connector -> Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa				2					2					
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa								1	1					

1.5.5 #38 Wairakei

Since June '23, 97% of all trips have not included any interchange from the #38 service to another service (**figure 14**). 1.8% of trips involved an interchange to route #38 and 1.3% of trips involved an interchange from route #38. Over the past 12 months (May '24-April '25), 95.1% of all trips have not included an interchange while 2.6% and 2.3% have include an interchange either to or from the service respectively.

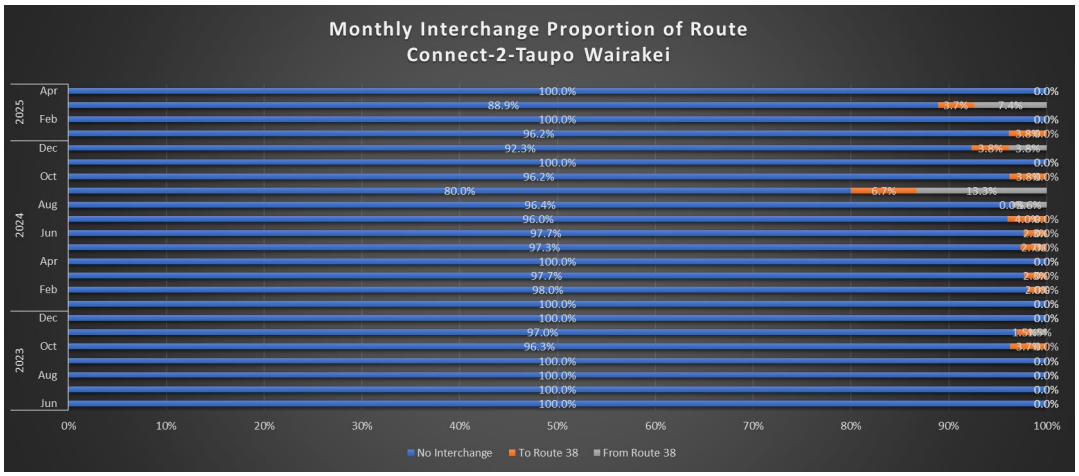


Figure 14. Passenger route interchanges June '23-April '25

Digging into the travel behaviour over the past 12 months, **table 11** below shows onto which services passengers are transferring to or from. Overall, there have only been four transfers either to or from the #38 service in 2025. Interchanges from route #38 have come from C2T services #34, #36 and #37. Interchanges to route #38 have come from C2T services #35, #38 and #37.

Table 11. Passenger route interchanges May '24-April '25

	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Total	2025 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	2025 Total
No Interchange														
No Interchange	36	42	24	27	24	51	36	24	432	25	19	24	24	92
From Route 38														
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay					1				1					
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect-2-Taupo Turangi				1	3				4			2		2
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei -> Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa								1	1					
To Route 38														
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei					1				1					
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei	1				1	2			4					
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa -> Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei		1	1					1	5	1		1		2

1.5.6 Summary of findings

It is clear that while interchanges between services are low in terms of overall patronage and travel behaviour, there is some transfer behaviour between services. In fact, the table below highlights in green the interchanges between the services. Those that don't have any transfers between each other are left in white and, as indicated, transfers between these services aren't possible as the services don't operate on the same day. It is also not surprising that #38 Wairakei connects with every other service since the #38 service runs daily and so daily connections to other routes are possible.

	#34 Acacia Bay	#35 Kinloch	#36 Turangi	#37 Tokoroa	#38 Wairakei
#34 Acacia Bay				don't run on the same day	
#35 Kinloch			don't run on the same day	don't run on the same day	
#36 Turangi		don't run on the same day		don't run on the same day	
#37 Tokoroa	don't run on the same day	don't run on the same day	don't run on the same day		
#38 Wairakei					

1.6 Revenue

Total farebox revenue is shown in **figure 15** and **table 12** below. It is important to note that the patronage and revenue data discussed in this section is shown in financial years (FY) and so the last two months of the 24/25 FY are missing from the data due to the timing of writing this report. Secondly, it is not always easy to make direct comparisons between the FY's as there are often changes to the fares and tickets whether through WRC or Central Government decision making which has had an impact on the farebox revenue. These include:

- The introduction of Youth Plus (19-24) and Youth (13-18) tickets in 23/24 (Central Government)
- The removal of subsidies for Youth (13-18) and Youth Plus (19-24) tickets in 24/25 (Central Government). The Youth Plus age group has now defaulted to falling within Adult tickets (and therefore have a higher fare).
- The removal of Senior tickets 24/25 (WRC). Passengers now either default to falling into the Adult ticket user or SuperGold depending on their age and whether they apply to be a SuperGold user.
- The removal of half price fares in July '23 (Central Government Covid Recovery decision).
- Weekly capping on all ticket types, however, Youth (13-18) have a lower weekly cap (WRC).
- A 20% increase in fares in July '24 (WRC).

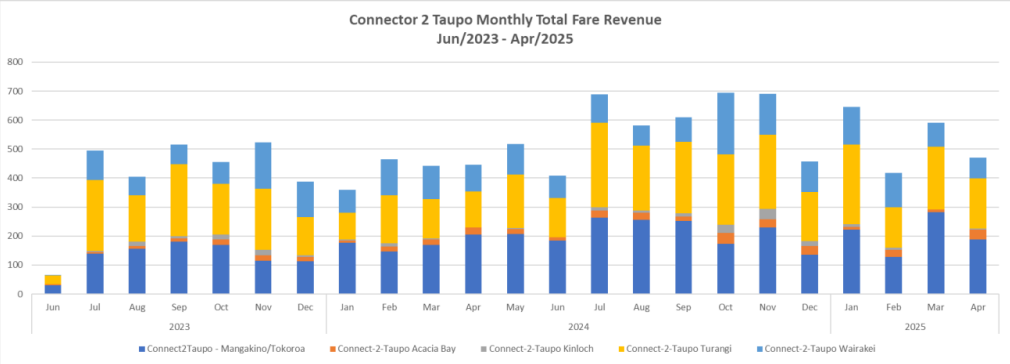


Figure 15. Fare Revenue for the 23/24 FY and the 24/25 FY.

Farebox revenue in the 23/24 FY totalled $5,421. In the 24/25 FY (only until 30th April '25), farebox revenue has totalled $5,845.5. This is already a 7% increase in farebox revenue without the FY having yet ended. This increase in revenue is driven by two main factors: the ending of half price fares and the growth in patronage.

Table 12. Farebox Revenue by Ticket Type for the 23/24 FY and the 24/25 FY

				Child - Infant		Senior -	Community Connect		Youth Plus			
	Accessibility	Adult	Child	Under 5	Senior	SuperGold	Concession	Youth (13-18)	(19-24)	Tertiary	Grand Total
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa	$ -	$3,253.40	$ 52.10	$ -	$566.50	$ -	$ 206.10	$ 40.60	$ 7.50	$ -	**$ 4,126.20**
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay	$ -	$ 256.80	$ 2.40	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 146.40	$ 2.00	$ 2.00	$ -	**$ 409.60**
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch	$ -	$ 178.60	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ -	$ 34.80	$ 12.00	$ -	$ -	**$ 225.40**
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi	$ -	$3,719.70	$ 6.00	$ -	$ 71.00	$ -	$ 396.90	$ 72.30	$ 6.50	$ -	**$ 4,272.40**
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei	$ -	$1,960.20	$ 2.40	$ -	$125.00	$ -	$ 109.70	$ 68.40	$ 31.00	$ 1.00	**$ 2,297.70**
Grand Total	**$ -**	**$9,368.70**	**$ 62.90**	**$ -**	**$762.50**	**$ -**	**$ 893.90**	**$ 195.30**	**$ 47.00**	**$ 1.00**	**$11,331.30**

1.7 Bus Stop Performance

Tables 13 to **14** below shows the bus stop performance for each FY of the C2T services since the launch of the service (the last two months of the 24/25 FY are missing from the data due to the timing of writing this report). A breakdown of the On Time performance is as follows:

- #34 Acacia Bay
    - On time bus performance is currently sitting at 51.7% (down from 55.8% in 23/24).
    - It is evident that large portions of trips are arriving at the bus stops early.

- #35 Kinloch
  - On time bus performance is currently sitting at 66.6% (down from 76.2% in 23/24).
  - It is evident that most inbound trips are arriving at the bus stops on time, but a large portion of trips outbound trips are arriving at the bus stops early.
- #36 Turangi
  - On time bus performance is currently sitting at 58.6% (up from 58.3% in 23/24).
  - It is evident that large portions of trips are arriving at the bus stops late.
- #37 Tokoroa
  - On time bus performance is currently sitting at 29.8% (up from 26.25 in 23/24).
  - It is evident that the Northbound stops are typically arriving early while the southbound stops are running late.
- #38 Wairakei
  - On time bus performance is currently sitting at 82.8% (up from 71.5% in 23/24).
  - It is evident that portions of the inbound trips are arriving at the bus stops early.

Table 13. Bus Stop Performance for route #34 over the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops
Inbound									
SchoolHoliday									
OffPeak				76.6%	0.7%	22.6%	61.5%	0.0%	38.5%
PM Peak				73.0%	0.0%	27.0%	60.1%	1.4%	38.5%
SchoolTerm									
OffPeak	68.3%	2.4%	29.3%	73.2%	1.2%	25.6%	62.4%	0.0%	37.6%
PM Peak	65.0%	0.0%	35.0%	66.9%	0.4%	32.7%	61.5%	0.2%	38.3%
Outbound									
SchoolHoliday									
AM Peak				40.2%	3.3%	56.5%	42.3%	0.0%	57.7%
OffPeak				44.6%	4.1%	51.4%	48.2%	2.9%	48.9%
PM Peak				49.0%	0.0%	51.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%
SchoolTerm									
AM Peak	46.7%	0.0%	53.3%	44.0%	0.3%	55.7%	40.5%	0.4%	59.1%
OffPeak	45.7%	0.0%	54.3%	43.7%	2.0%	54.4%	44.6%	0.2%	55.1%
PM Peak	40.0%	0.0%	60.0%	46.4%	0.0%	53.6%	46.3%	0.0%	53.7%

Table 14. Bus Stop Performance for route #35 over the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops
Inbound									
SchoolHoliday									
OffPeak				82.4%	0.0%	17.7%	85.2%	0.0%	14.8%
PM Peak				87.7%	1.5%	10.8%	84.9%	0.0%	15.1%
SchoolTerm									
OffPeak	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	86.7%	0.0%	13.3%	77.7%	0.0%	22.4%
PM Peak	70.0%	0.0%	30.0%	82.8%	3.0%	14.3%	81.3%	0.0%	18.7%
Outbound									
SchoolHoliday									
AM Peak				61.3%	6.5%	32.3%	48.8%	0.0%	51.2%
OffPeak				69.7%	0.0%	30.3%	54.6%	0.0%	45.5%
SchoolTerm									
AM Peak	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	70.4%	1.9%	27.8%	50.0%	2.5%	47.5%
OffPeak	72.7%	0.0%	27.3%	69.0%	0.0%	31.0%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%

Table 15. Bus Stop Performance for route #36 over the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops
Inbound									
SchoolHoliday									
OffPeak				51.2%	45.2%	3.6%	49.0%	51.0%	0.0%
PM Peak				47.0%	48.0%	5.0%	36.5%	60.6%	2.9%
SchoolTerm									
OffPeak	45.8%	54.2%	0.0%	61.3%	37.6%	1.1%	64.0%	35.7%	0.3%
PM Peak	45.8%	54.2%	0.0%	52.5%	42.1%	5.4%	53.4%	45.9%	0.7%
Outbound									
SchoolHoliday									
OffPeak				62.3%	22.3%	15.4%	64.8%	33.6%	1.6%
PM Peak				69.8%	20.7%	9.5%	54.6%	43.9%	1.5%
SchoolTerm									
OffPeak	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	63.0%	20.0%	16.9%	82.4%	16.4%	1.2%
PM Peak	46.2%	0.0%	53.9%	59.3%	26.0%	14.8%	64.3%	34.9%	0.8%

Table 16. Bus Stop Performance for route #37 over the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops
Northbound									
SchoolHoliday									
AM Peak				24.8%	8.7%	66.5%	27.9%	5.1%	67.0%
OffPeak				28.7%	8.6%	62.7%	27.9%	10.9%	61.2%
SchoolTerm									
AM Peak	34.5%	15.9%	49.7%	25.1%	5.2%	69.8%	21.5%	1.6%	76.9%
OffPeak	37.0%	8.9%	54.1%	26.2%	3.4%	70.3%	24.8%	7.2%	68.1%
Southbound									
SchoolHoliday									
OffPeak				22.3%	76.9%	0.7%	30.2%	63.2%	6.7%
PM Peak				27.6%	66.9%	5.5%	39.3%	54.0%	6.8%
SchoolTerm									
OffPeak	12.2%	87.8%	0.0%	23.0%	74.5%	2.6%	30.6%	64.0%	5.4%
PM Peak	34.7%	54.5%	10.9%	32.0%	61.4%	6.6%	36.2%	59.2%	4.6%

Table 17. Bus Stop Performance for route #38 over the 22/23, 23/24 and 24/25 FY

	2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops	Percentage Of Ontime Bus Stops	Percentage Of Late Bus Stops	Percentage Of Early Bus Stops
Inbound									
SchoolHoliday									
AM Peak				58.8%	7.1%	34.1%	67.1%	0.0%	32.9%
OffPeak				74.1%	4.6%	21.3%	86.1%	5.3%	8.6%
SchoolTerm									
AM Peak	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	66.3%	2.2%	31.5%	68.0%	2.3%	29.7%
OffPeak	50.0%	5.2%	44.8%	71.6%	1.4%	26.9%	82.2%	0.9%	17.0%
Outbound									
SchoolHoliday									
AM Peak				77.3%	1.3%	21.4%	92.8%	0.0%	7.3%
OffPeak				74.2%	4.6%	21.2%	88.3%	7.3%	4.5%
SchoolTerm									
AM Peak	73.2%	5.4%	21.4%	75.2%	2.2%	22.6%	90.3%	0.0%	9.7%
OffPeak	76.0%	0.6%	23.4%	74.3%	1.2%	24.5%	88.2%	3.2%	8.7%

Collectively, on time performance is sitting at 57.9% across the C2T network. There is certainly room for improvement regarding on time performance and any proposed network changes will include a review of the timetable to ascertain what changes can be made which could improve on time performance. To note, however, is that this on time performance is for every bus stop along each route. For on time performance Key Performance Indicators (KPI's), WRC aims to have an 100% on time performance for only the start/original and final/end bus stops.

1.8 Customer Feedback

Customer feedback on the C2T services via the customer and BUSIT portal has been summarised below by category of the feedback. This is all the feedback received between October 2022 and April 2025 and have been followed up and resolved by the customer focus or operations team.

Feedback Category	Route #34	Route #35	Route #36	Route #37	Route #38
Missing property				1	1
On time or timetable issue (eg. bus too early or late / timetable change)			2	1	1
Bus issue (overcapacity)			2	2	
Route issue (change in route / bus stop)				5	1
Payment / Fare issue		1			
Website / information issue		1	2		
Request for additional trips				1	

1.9 Operators Feedback

Below is feedback from the operators (Tranzit) for the five C2T services.

- #34 Acacia Bay
  - 1 passenger from Nukuhau but never takes return bus home.
- #35 Kinloch
  - 1 person only out of the 3 trips
- #36 Turangi
  - Only had to leave passenger behind three times so far this year.
  - Timetable is too tight with all the traffic on the road. Most times it is normally 10 minutes late and customers complain.
- #37 Tokoroa
  - Going well.
  - Only 1 passenger at Whakamaru most days.
  - Some passengers complain there is not enough time in Taupo.
- #38 Wairakei
  - Pick up a few tourists going to Huka Falls, Wairakei and workers/shoppers for Wairakei Village.

1.10 Costs

Below are the costs allocated for the C2T network over the 21-24 and 24-27 NLTP periods. As these budgets have been confirmed, and approved, for the 24-27 NLTP period, ideally, any proposed network changes should be done on a cost (or as close to) neutral basis.

Requested (and approved) budget from NZTA for the 21-24 NLTP period through LCLR		Requested (and approved) budget from NZTA for the 24-27 NLTP period through LCLR		
Total cost $'s 2022/23	**Total cost $'s 2023/24**	**Total cost $'s 2024/25**	**Total cost $'s 2025/26**	**Total cost $'s 2026/27**
126,000	129,000	$176,476	$184,644	$193,305

2 Possible Route Changes

2.1 Considerations

Due to either poor route on time performance, capacity concerns or low passenger numbers, it is being recommended that changes are made to the service to better meet the needs of the community and become a more efficient service. This section explores such possible changes and puts forward possible timetable options. Four main factors have contributed to the opportunities and limitations for network changes on this network and are discussed in detail below. These are: 1) funding limitations, 2) vehicle size limitations, 3) vehicle utilization across five routes and, 4) considerations from the service review in section 1 above.

2.1.1 Funding limitations

It is worth considering the funding environment that the C2T services fall within. As it is a trial service under Waka Kotahi / New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) Low-Cost Low-Risk (LCLR) program, funding for this service is not guaranteed beyond the 26/27 financial year. It is anticipated that by the end of the 26/27 FY a decision at that point will need to be made whether to discontinue the service or absorb it into WRC's continuous program. It is therefore critical to ensure that in the next two-to-three years that the service is given its best chance to succeed and be utilized by the Taupo District community. It is clear that the current timetable and vehicle allocation does not fully meet the communities needs or, in some instances, demand, therefore limiting the number of potential passengers and potentially setting the service up for failure come its final deliberation. It is therefore considered imperative that vehicle reallocation and timetable adjustments are made on the C2T network.

2.1.2 Limitations due to the shuttle size

Since the vehicle operating the C2T services is a 12-seater shuttle, and that to replace the shuttle with a larger bus isn't quite feasible within the above-mentioned funding constraints, there are limitations to the C2T network with regards to this. Primarily, capacity constraints will likely always remain a concern and limitation meaning that both patronage growth and farebox revenue will be capped at a certain point (at least on the higher performing routes). The only two routes currently experiencing any capacity constraints is the #36 Turangi and #37 Tokoroa routes as discussed above. This justifies an increase in service frequency for both routes.

2.1.3 One vehicle and five routes

Designing a public transport network with just one vehicle serving five different routes presents several logistical and operational challenges, namely scheduling constraints and route optimization. With only one vehicle, trip frequency is severely limited, reducing flexibility for passengers. The vehicle must cover five routes efficiently, meaning careful planning is needed to minimize dead mileage (distance travelled without passengers). Longer-distance routes may restrict the number of trips possible in a single day.

Balancing service times across multiple routes can be difficult, as demand may vary by day and location. Peak-hour congestion could lead to delays, affecting reliability on subsequent routes.

2.1.4 Considerations from the service review above

The Key findings from the patronage trends and findings discussed above can be summarised as:

1. **Overall Growth:**
    - The total patronage increase of 8% across all five services is a positive trend, indicating rising demand for public transport in the area.
    - However, growth rates vary significantly between routes, suggesting certain services are performing much better than others.
2. **Strongest Growth in Low-Patronage Routes:**
    - Acacia Bay (#34) and Kinloch (#35) experienced the highest growth (36% and 31% respectively), despite historically lower total patronage. This suggests that increased awareness, latent demand or improved accessibility has led to greater adoption of these services.
3. **Moderate Growth in High-Patronage Routes:**
    - Turangi (#36) and Tokoroa (#37), the busiest routes, only saw marginal increases (7% and 9%) despite their already high passenger volumes.
    - This suggests these routes are nearing (or at) capacity under their current scheduling, meaning demand may exist for increased service frequency.
4. **Minimal Growth in Wairakei:**
    - Despite having five return trips per week, Wairakei (#38) saw just a 1% increase in patronage, making it the least improved service.
    - Given this stagnation in ridership, it may indicate over-servicing relative to actual demand.

Considering this, there are a few recommendations for improving efficiency which are outlined below:

1. **Adjust Trip Frequency Based on Growth Trends**
    - Increase service frequency for Acacia Bay (#34) and Kinloch (#35) to capitalize on growing demand. This is not being recommended at this point as despite the growing demand, patronage is low, and vehicle capacity is sufficient to capture any further growth.
    - Reduce trip allocation for Wairakei (#38) to reflect its low growth and reallocate some trips to better-performing routes. This is being recommended.
2. **Enhance Service Promotion for Higher-Performing Routes**
    - It is worth considering adding additional return trips for Tokoroa (#37) and Turangi (#36), as their patronage suggests demand could support more services. This is being recommended.
3. **Consider Demand-Responsive Transport (DRT) for Low-Demand Areas**
    - If Kinloch and Acacia Bay's patronage remains lower overall despite growth, a flexible, demand-responsive transport model (rather than rigid scheduling) could improve efficiency while maintaining service accessibility. This is not being recommended at this point due to the higher cost of a DRT and current funding limitations as well as the fact that community engagement previously indicated that DRT services were not preferred.
4. **Vehicle changes**
    - Upgrading the 12-seater shuttle to a larger vehicle / bus: Having a larger vehicle could negate the need for service frequency enhancements on the #37 and #36 route as demand could support the need for a larger vehicle. This is being considered but comes at increased costs.

2.2 Possible Service Changes

2.2.1 Route and timetable changes

Three options have been developed to make changes to the C2T network. Two options are the reutilization and prioritization of the current vehicle, making changes to the timetable and adding or removing services on some of the service legs (one more cost effective and one with better vehicle utilization). The third option is a higher cost option utilizing a larger vehicle (bus) that is currently running as the assist bus on the Taupo Connector (#33) to do some of the busier trips. The similarities and differences are summarized below.

2.2.1.1 Option 1 – Reutilization of the existing shuttle (most cost effective)

The below timetable and network option is the most cost-effective in terms of reutilization of the existing shuttle. The key changes here are:

- Acacia Bay loses two return trips (Wednesdays)
- Wairakei loses two return trips (Fridays)
- Turangi gains **two** extra trips on a separate day (Wednesdays)
- Tokoroa gains **one** extra trip on the same day (Friday midday)

The approximate cost for this service change is an additional annual cost of **$8,300.20**

Monday	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Turangi	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8:20 - 9:11	9.35 - 10:20	10:45 - 12:54	13.30 -14.15	14:45 - 15.36	15:50 - 17.59
Tuesday	Tokoroa	Wairakei		Wairakei		Tokoroa
	7:25 - 10:45	10:55 - 11:40		13.30 -14.15		14:30 - 17:50
Wednesday	Kinloch	Wairakei	Turangi extra	Wairakei	Kinloch	Turangi extra
	8:20 - 9:30	9.35 - 10:20	10:45 - 12:54	13.30 -14.15	14:20 - 15:40	15:50 - 17.59
Thursday	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Turangi	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8:20 - 9:11	9.35 - 10:20	10:45 - 12:54	13.30 -14.15	14:45 - 15.36	15:50 - 17.59
Friday	Tokoroa		Tokoroa extra			Tokoroa
	7:25 - 10:45		11:00 - 14:20			14:30 - 17:50

2.2.1.2 Option 2 – Reutilization of the existing shuttle (best vehicle utilization)

The below timetable and network option is considered to make the best utilization of the existing shuttle. The key changes here are:

- Acacia Bay loses two return trips (Wednesdays)
- Wairakei loses two return trips (Tuesdays)
- Turangi gains **two** extra trips on a separate day (Wednesdays)
- Tokoroa gains **two** extra trips on a separate day (Wednesdays)

The approximate cost for this service change is an additional annual cost of **$36,158.18**

Monday	Turangi	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	7:15 - 9:24	9.30 - 10:15	10:25 - 11:16	13.45 -14.30	14:35 - 15.26	15:35 - 17:44
Tuesday	Tokoroa	Kinloch		Kinloch	Tokoroa	
	7:20 - 10:40	10:45 - 12:00		14:15 - 14:30	14:35 - 17:55	
Wednesday	Turangi extra	Wairakei	Tokoroa extra	Wairakei	Turangi extra	Tokoroa extra
	7:15 - 9:24	9.30 - 10:15	10:20 - 13:40	13.45 -14.30	14:35 - 16:44	16:50 - 20:10
Thursday	Turangi	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	7:15- 9:24	9.30 - 10:15	10:25 - 11:16	13.45 -14.30	14:35 - 15.26	15:35 - 17:44
Friday	Tokoroa	Wairakei		Wairakei	Tokoroa	
	7:20 - 10:40	10:45 - 11:30		13.45 -14.30	14:35 - 17:55	

2.2.1.3 Option 3 - Reutilization of the existing shuttle and utilizing an available spare bus

The below option introduces a bus to the C2T network to assist with capacity limitations. This bus is currently operating as an assist bus on the Taupo Connector bus service and is therefore only available for use between 8:30am and 15:15pm.

The key changes here are:

- Acacia Bay loses two return trips (Wednesdays)
- Wairakei loses two return trips (Tuesdays)
- Turangi gains **two** extra trips on a separate day (Fridays)
    - Four of the six trips will be operated by a bus
- Tokoroa gains **two** extra trips on a separate day (Wednesdays)
    - Four of the six trips will be operated by a bus

The approximate cost for this service change is an additional annual cost of **$67,203.82**

Monday	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Wairakei	Acacia Bay
	8:20 - 9:11	9:45 - 10:30	13:30 - 14:15	14:45 - 15.36
BUS	Turangi - BUS		Turangi	
	8:30 - 10:39		13:00 - 15:06	
Tuesday	Tokoroa		Tokoroa	
	8:30 - 11:50		13:15 - 16:35	
Wednesday	Kinloch	Wairakei	Wairakei	Kinloch
	8:20 - 9:35	9:45 - 10:30	13:30 - 14:15	14:30 - 15:45
BUS	To Tokoroa extra		From Tokoroa extra	
	8:30 - 10:05		13:25 - 15:00	
Thursday	Acacia Bay	Wairakei	Wairakei	Acacia Bay
	8:20 - 9:11	9:45 - 10:30	13:30 - 14:15	14:35 - 15.36
BUS	Turangi extra		Turangi extra	
	8:30 - 10:39		13:00 - 15:06	
Friday	Turangi	Wairakei	Wairakei	Turangi
	7:30 - 9:39	9:45 - 10:30	13:30 - 14:15	15:35 - 17:44
BUS	To Tokoroa extra		From Tokoroa extra	
	8:30 - 10:05		13:25 - 15:00	

2.2.2 Rates implications

As the recommended service change is not withdrawing completely from any community, nor is it going to any new community or location, there is considered to be no rates implications as a result of any of the proposed changes.

2.3 Next steps

As this report has largely been a desktop exercise, the key next steps are listed below:

1. **Community Consultation**

Since the proposed timetable options above involve changes to public transport services to all communities within the C2T network, it is important that community consultation is undertaken. This consultation will test our theories and timetable options which will assist in determining a preferred option for implementation.

WRC staff are in communication with staff from Taupo District Council who will lead the engagement. It is anticipated that consultation will be targeted to each community. It is intended that consultation will help determine a preferred and second preferred timetable option from the above three options. It is also intended that feedback on the timings of the trips will help ensure that the proposed timetable is fit for purpose or allow us to undertake any timing adjustments to the preferred timetable.

2. **Operational input**

WRC will need to engage with the operators of the service (Tranzit) to ensure that the preferred timetable is achievable and feasible. They will be able to test the timetable while considering other aspects such as driver breaks.

3. **Funding considerations**

It is clear that any service change will likely result in an increase in operating costs. As the service is funded by NZTA / Waka Kotahi and Taupo District Council (soon to be WRC following the change in rating collection), discussions between both parties will need to be held to approve any increase in cost for the service. It is acknowledged that while Option 3 may be preferred (either on paper or through consultation), there is no guarantee that the funds required to implement this option will be available. Should this be the case, then WRC will progress with implementing the second preferred option.

4. **Implementation**

Once consultation has been completed and a preferred network determined, WRC will aim to present the recommended service change to the Regional Transport Committee (RTC) for endorsement in September ’25. Following this endorsement, WRC will aim to implement the changes as part of the next possible network change which is scheduled for April ’26.

Connect-2-Taupo 2025 survey results and proposed changes for bus routes #34, #35, #36, #37 and #38

In October 2022 five new 'Connect-2-Taupo' (C2T) bus routes were introduced in the Taupo District. These routes and their operating days are listed below:

1) Acacia Bay to Taupo (#34)
    a. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday
2) Kinloch to Taupo (#35)
    a. Wednesday
3) Turangi to Taupo (#36)
    a. Monday and Thursday
4) Tokoroa to Taupo (#37)
    a. Tuesday and Friday
5) Wairakei to Taupo (#38)
    a. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

The service is currently operated by one 12-seater shuttle that interchanges between the different routes throughout the day. **Table 1** below shows this schedule. Having one vehicle operate between five separate routes and communities efficiently and effectively can be difficult to manage and makes any timetable or route changes complicated.

Table 1. The current vehicle and route schedule

Monday	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Turangi	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8.30 - 9.25	9.35 - 10.20	10.45 - 12.35	13.30 - 14.15	14.45 - 15.40	15.50 - 17.40
Tuesday	Wairaki	Tokoroa	Wairaki	Tokoroa		
	7.00 - 7.45	8.00 - 11.14	12.15 - 13.00	13.15 - 16.34		
Wednesday	Kinloch	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Kinloch	Acacia Bay
	8.20 - 9.35	9.35 - 10.20	10.35 - 11.30	13.30 - 14.15	14.30 - 15.45	15.50 - 16.45
Thursday	Acacia Bay	Wairaki	Turangi	Wairaki	Acacia Bay	Turangi
	8.30 - 9.25	9.35 - 10.20	10.45 - 12.35	13.30 - 14.15	14.45 - 15.40	15.50 - 17.40
Friday	Wairaki	Tokoroa	Wairaki	Tokoroa		
	7.00 - 7.45	8.00 - 11.14	12.15 - 13.00	13.15 - 16.34		

Following community feedback and the upcoming decision by Waikato Regional Council (WRC) and New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) on the permanency of the C2T services, a review of the service was undertaken in mid-2025 to assess the service and recommend service changes (see "*Connect-2-Taupo 2025 Service Review for bus routes #34, #35, #36, #37 and #38*" Discover ID #32202945). Following the service review and proposed recommendation for service changes, WRC went out for public consultation on the proposed changes with all six communities for three weeks in November 2025. This document analyses the survey results and suggests final recommendations for proposed service changes on the Connect-2-Taupo service.

Contents

1 Summary of Proposed Changes

The proposed changes to the Connect-2-Taupo (C2T) services that were consulted on are summarized in the following sections. Minor changes to the proposed timetable that was shown in the *Connect-2-Taupo 2025 Service Review for bus routes #34, #35, #36, #37 and #38* document were made prior to consultation as detailed timetable work resulted in vehicle utilisation adjustments. Timetables were also run past the operator (Tranzit) who raised a few concerns regarding adequate layover time, particularly when utilising the spare Taupo Connector bus as it needed to arrive or return to Taupo with adequate time before/after its scheduled Taupo Connector trips.

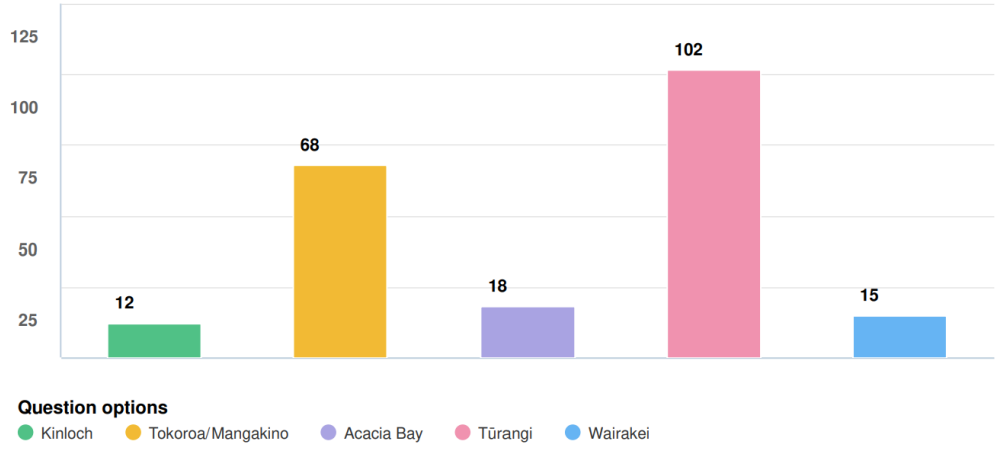
Overall, the proposed changes involve:

- Increasing trips on routes with higher demand (Tokoroa/Mangakino and Tūrangi)
- Reducing trips on routes with lower demand (Acacia Bay and Wairakei)
- Introducing a larger bus to better serve busy routes and where it is possible to do so
- Adjusting trip times to allow better vehicle utilisation and passenger travel times

The following sections break down the changes per route and summarise the feedback on the proposed changes.

2 Survey Results

Overall, we received 183 responses split by the below routes.



Mandatory Question (183 response(s))

2.1 #34 Acacia Bay

Currently, Acacia Bay receives three return trips a week: Monday, Wednesday and, Thursday. In response to increasing demand on the Tokoroa and Tūrangi routes, we proposed reallocating vehicles. For Acacia Bay, this included removing Wednesday services between Taupō and Acacia Bay, reducing the number of return trips from three to two per week. Patronage data showed Wednesday was the least-used travel day, so we aimed to retain the higher-performing Monday and Thursday services, largely at their existing times. The proposed timetable we consulted on is shown below.

Acacia Bay timetable

The proposed timetable is below.

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Acacia Bay	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	8.20	2.45	No service		No service		8.20	2.45	No service	
Acacia Bay	8.50	3.15					8.50	3.15		
Acacia Bay to Taupō										
Acacia Bay	8.55	3.20					8.55	3.20		
Taupō	9.11	3.36					9.11	3.36		

When asked “have you used the Acacia Bay service in the last six months?” 70.6% (12) respondents answers “no” while 29.4% (5) respondents answered “yes”. When asked “What do you usually use this service for (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 3 responses for ‘shopping’,
- 3 responses for ‘social and leisure’,
- 2 responses for ‘medical’,
- 1 response for ‘work’ and,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘education’ or ‘other’.

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Acacia Bay service more often? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 3 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 2 responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’,
- 2 responses for 'the service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 1 response for ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 1 response for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’ and,
- 1 response for ‘No barriers for me’
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘I don’t feel safe using it’, ‘I didn’t know this service existed’ or, ‘other’.

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Acacia Bay service? (Select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 5 responses for ‘The service is too infrequent’,
- 3 responses for ‘The service day(s) don’t suit me’,
- 3 responses for 'The service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 2 responses for 'The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 2 responses for 'I didn’t know this service existed’,
- 2 responses for ‘Other (please specify)’,
- 1 response for 'No barriers for me’ and,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’ and ‘I don’t feel safe using it’

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above, respondents (5 in total) highlighted that the proposed timetable is a barrier, with services only operating two days a week and large gaps between morning and afternoon trips. One noted the schedule does not suit working hours, making it impractical for commuting. One mentioned uncertainty about the timetable, while two indicated potential use for family or holiday home visitors. There was also interest in weekend services for visiting family.

When asked "Would the removal of Wednesday trips negatively impact you?" 69.2% (9) of respondents said "no" while 30.8% (4) of respondents said "yes". Finally, we asked if the respondents had any further feedback on the service. Five comments were received where respondents expressed concern that the current timetable is unsuitable for many potential users and that the survey may not fully reflect demand. There were calls to avoid further service reductions, improve publicity, and consider routing via Taupō Airport for better connectivity.

2.1.1 Overall Comment and Recommendation

Based on sustained low patronage (311 passengers over 2.5 years) and survey evidence indicating limited recent use (70.6% have not used the service in the last six months), we recommend removing the Wednesday Acacia Bay return trip and retaining Monday and Thursday at their proposed times. This change is justified on two grounds:

1. Efficiency and alignment with demand: Wednesday is the least-used day, while Monday and Thursday perform comparatively better. Consolidating services onto the higher-performing days maintains access for the core use cases (shopping, social/leisure, medical) while enabling necessary vehicle reallocation to meet higher demand on the Tokoroa and Tūrangi routes. Notably, most respondents (69.2%) indicated that removing Wednesday would not negatively impact them.

2. Resource constraints and operational practicality: With one vehicle covering five routes, we are constrained in our ability to add trips or re-time services at present. Reallocating capacity now is required to maintain overall network reliability and respond to demand growth elsewhere, without incurring additional cost or compromising performance.

While timing and frequency are cited barriers, these do not negate the need for immediate reallocation. Instead, they set the direction for future improvements. We will consider timetable adjustments - targeting reduced gaps between trips and better alignment with working hours - when vehicle utilization allows. In the interim, we will aim to improve publicity for the retained services and monitor patronage to assess the impact of this change and identify feasible enhancements, including potential weekend options or airport connectivity if evidence supports them. This recommendation balances local access with whole-of-network efficiency and is proportionate to demonstrated demand, operational constraints, and respondent feedback.

2.2 #35 Kinloch

The Kinloch service currently operates one return trip per week connecting with Taupō on Wednesdays. Due to low usage, we proposed two possible timetable options moving forward:

- Option one retained a one-day-a-week service on Wednesdays with a slight change in trip times, giving customers less time in Taupō - four hours as opposed to five.
- Option two increased the service to three return trips per week by re-routing the Tokoroa to Taupō service via Kinloch. This option involved significant changes to arrival and departure times, with customers having the choice of either six hours in Tokoroa and two hours in Taupō.

We sought feedback on which option was preferable and invited suggestions to improve usage, noting that the long-term viability of the service may be at risk without increased demand. The proposed timetables we consulted on are shown below.

Timetable option one

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Kinloch	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	No service		No service		7.45	1.00	No service		No service	
Kinloch					8.25	1.40				
Kinloch to Taupō										
Kinloch					8.30	1.45				
Taupō					9.00	2.15				

Timetable option two

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Kinloch	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	No service		7.50	1.40	7.50	1.40	No service		7.50	1.40
Kinloch			8.10	2.00	8.10	2.00			8.10	2.00
Tokoroa			9.32	3.22	9.32	3.22			9.32	3.22
Kinloch to Taupō										
Tokoroa			9.45	3.35	9.45	3.35			9.45	3.35
Kinloch			11.20	5.10	11.20	5.10			11.20	5.10
Taupō			11.40	5.30	11.40	5.30			11.40	5.30

When asked “have you used the Kinloch service in the last six months?” 66.7% (8) respondents answers “no” while 33.2% (4) respondents answered “yes”. When asked “What do you usually use this service for (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 2 responses for ‘shopping’,
- 1 response for ‘social and leisure’,
- 1 response for ‘medical’,
- 1 response for ‘work’,
- 1 response for ‘education’ and,
- 1 response for ‘other’

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Kinloch service more often? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 4 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 2 responses for 'the service time(s) don’t suit me’,

- 1 response for ‘I didn’t know this service existed’,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’, ‘I don’t feel safe using it’, ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’, ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’ or ‘No barriers for me’

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above, one respondent noted that the morning service works well but the afternoon service is too early for commuters who work a full-time job while another respondent requested the service to remain. When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Kinloch service more often? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 5 responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’,
- 4 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 3 responses for 'the service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 2 responses for ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 1 response for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’,
- 1 response for ‘No barriers for me’,
- 1 response for 'other’ and,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘I don’t feel safe using it’ or ‘I didn’t know this service existed’.

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above, two respondents suggested that they would use the service if it operated on weekends while another noted that they wouldn’t use a Kinloch to Taupo service at all. When asked “Looking at the timetable options above, which would you prefer?”, responses included:

- 36.4% (4) respondents answered “Option one: One day a week service with more time in Taupō”
- 36.4% (4) respondents answered “Neither option works for me (please explain)”
- 27.3% (3) respondents answered “Option two: Three day a week service but less time in Taupō AND a connection to Tokoroa”

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above, one respondent noted that the current timetable has too long in Taupo and also suggested additional stops (eg. By Pak ‘n Save) in Taupo while another respondent requested that the return trip to Taupo leave later, around 3pm.

The service has had only 142 passengers since launch (Nov 2022-April 2025)

2.2.1 Overall Comment and Recommendation

Given the extremely low patronage and operational constraints, we recommend retaining a one-day-a-week service on Wednesdays with a slight timetable adjustment to allow four hours in Taupō (Option One). While Option Two offers the advantage of testing demand under more realistic conditions before the trial ends, the capacity limitations of the 12-seater shuttle present a significant operational risk. Diverting via Kinloch could result in Tokoroa passengers losing seats to Kinloch riders, creating frustration and undermining confidence in the service. Given that the Tokoroa–Taupō route already experiences capacity issues, introducing an additional boarding point without increasing vehicle size would likely exacerbate these problems. It is also not possible at this point to increase the vehicle size on the Tokoroa-Taupō service.

Therefore, the recommendation is to retain Option One – a one-day-a-week service for Kinloch with improved time in Taupō - while implementing targeted measures to boost awareness and monitor demand. This approach avoids compromising the Tokoroa service, which is already under pressure, and ensures reliability for existing users.

WRC staff consider this to be the best approach for the below reasons:

1. Demand does not justify expansion: With only 142 passengers over 2.5 years and most respondents indicating infrequency and timing as barriers, increasing to three days per week would significantly increase costs and complexity without clear evidence of improved uptake.

2. Capacity risk outweighs trial uplift benefits: Testing demand through Option Two would be valuable, but not at the cost of leaving Tokoroa passengers behind or creating inequity between communities. Service reliability is critical for maintaining trust and usage.
3. Operational constraints are fixed: The inability to upgrade to a larger vehicle (due to school transport commitments) means we cannot mitigate the capacity issue in the short term. Adding Kinloch to the Tokoroa route without increasing capacity introduces a high likelihood of negative user experience.
4. Trial objectives can still be met: While we cannot test frequency uplift for Kinloch now, we can strengthen evidence through improved publicity, monitoring, and targeted engagement. This will help inform the final assessment without risking disruption to other routes.
5. Alignment with feedback: While some respondents requested weekend services and later return times, these changes cannot be implemented immediately due to vehicle utilization limits and available budgets. However, the proposed adjustment under Option One improves time in Taupō and maintains a connection for essential trips, which aligns with the most preferred option among respondents.
6. Future scenario remains open: If additional resources or vehicle flexibility become available before the trial ends, Option Two could be reconsidered. For now, the priority is network stability and equitable access.

Moving forward, we aim to monitor patronage closely to assess whether demand changes following timetable adjustments, improve publicity for the service to increase awareness and will continue to consider future enhancements - such as weekend trips, later return times, and additional stops - when resources allow and if demand supports these changes. This recommendation balances maintaining access for Kinloch residents with the need to manage resources efficiently across the network.

2.3 #36 Tūrangi

In response to increasing demand and capacity constraints, we proposed the following changes for Tūrangi:

- Increasing the number of weekly return services between Tūrangi and Taupō from two to three, with the additional trip scheduled for Friday.
- Operating all service days with a larger bus instead of the existing smaller shuttle.
- Introducing new times for all trips.

The proposed timetable we consulted on is shown below. *Note that since consultation minor changes to these times have been made in response to feedback from the operators. These changes are not considered to impact the quality of the feedback.*

Tūrangi timetable

The proposed timetable is below.

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Tūrangi	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	8.30	1.00	No service		No service		8.30	1.00	8.30	1.00
Tūrangi	9.32	2.02					9.32	2.02	9.32	2.02
Tūrangi to Taupō										
Tūrangi	9.37	2.04					9.37	2.04	9.37	2.04
Taupō	10.39	3.06					10.39	3.06	10.39	3.06

When asked “have you used the Tūrangi service in the last six months?” 51% (50) of respondents answers “no” while 49% (48) of respondents answered “yes”. When asked “What do you usually use this service for (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 31 responses for ‘shopping’,
- 18 responses for ‘social and leisure’,
- 11 responses for ‘medical’,
- 7 responses for ‘work’,
- 2 responses for ‘education’ and,
- 5 responses for ‘other’

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Tūrangi service more often? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 26 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 22 responses for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’
- 15 responses for ‘the service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 11 responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’
- 4 responses for ‘I don’t feel safe using it’,
- 2 responses for ‘No barriers for me’,
- 2 responses for ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 1 response for 'other’ and,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘I didn’t know this service existed’,

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current timetable and service frequency. Key themes include:

- Need for weekday commuter service: Multiple comments requested buses operating five days a week, with early departures (around 7:00–8:00 am) to reach Taupō by 8:00–9:00 am and return trips around 5:30 pm to accommodate workers.

- More flexibility and additional runs: Suggestions included multiple trips per day for appointments, errands, and visitors, as well as later return times for school activities and shorter visits.
- Hospital and town access: Calls for routing via Taupō Hospital and key destinations (e.g., Spa Road, Pak'nSave) to improve usability.
- Current timetable issues: The proposed new schedule was criticized for allowing only 2.5 hours in Taupō, which is seen as insufficient. Some respondents noted the need for Tuesday or Wednesday runs and mentioned specific use cases (e.g., Gold Card discounts on Tuesdays).
- Capacity concerns: Limited seating means some passengers miss out, especially when the bus is already full from Motuoapa.
- Safety and comfort: One comment raised concerns about driver behavior and heating on the bus.
- Community engagement: Strong sentiment that the service needs better consultation.

Overall, feedback emphasizes greater frequency, better timing for commuters, improved routing, and increased capacity, with frustration over the current limitations and urgency for meaningful improvements.

When asked "What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Tūrangi service? (select all that apply)", responses included:

- 22 responses for 'the service is too infrequent',
- 16 responses for 'the service time(s) don't suit me',
- 14 responses for 'the service day(s) don't suit me',
- 9 responses for 'The bus isn't big enough (not enough seating)',
- 9 responses for 'I didn't know this service existed',
- 7 responses for 'The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home',
- 4 responses for 'other',
- 1 response for 'No barriers for me' and,
- 0 people indicated responses for 'I don't feel safe using it'.

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above respondents highlighted several key issues and suggestions:

- Capacity and seat availability: The service is often full, leaving passengers from SH1 villages (e.g., Motuoapa, Kuratau) without seats. Some suggested a pre-booking system to guarantee seats.
- Need for a larger bus and more time in Taupō: Current time in Taupō is considered too short, limiting usefulness for errands and appointments.
- Commuter-friendly scheduling: Strong calls for weekday services with early morning departures (around 7:00 am) and late afternoon returns (around 5:30 pm) to support workers. Current timings are seen as catering mainly to retirees.
- Additional frequency and flexibility: Suggestions for two return trips per day or weekend services for markets and recreation.
- Awareness and accessibility: Some respondents were unaware of the service and requested better advertising. Others noted the importance of the service for those without cars or with health conditions.
- Routing and stops: Requests for stops in Motuoapa and consideration of hospital access.
- Community isolation concerns: Feedback emphasized the importance of reliable public transport for reducing isolation and supporting future needs.
- Other comments: One respondent suggested council staff use the service to fill seats and reduce costs.

Overall, feedback underscores capacity issues, insufficient frequency, poor alignment with work schedules, and low awareness, alongside strong demand for a more practical and inclusive service.

Regarding the additional day of service, we asked the community "Please pick which additional day(s) you would use the Tūrangi service if they became available (Select all that apply)" (the service currently operates Monday and Thursday). 67 people selected Friday, 58 selected Wednesday, and 45 selected Tuesday. Subsequently, it appears that the proposed additional service day being on a Friday is the preferred option.

We asked the community "Looking at the above proposed timetable, will your use of this service be negatively impacted by the proposed change in timetable?". 77.1% (64) of respondents answered 'no' while 22.9% (19) of respondents answered 'yes'.

Lastly, we asked the community "if you have any further comments about the Tūrangi service, please include them". Feedback strongly reinforced the importance of the Tūrangi–Taupō service to the community, particularly for those without access to private vehicles, older residents, and people needing access to employment, health services, and shopping in Taupō. Many respondents described the service as valuable, economical, and well-operated, with frequent praise for drivers. However, several recurring concerns were raised:

- Timing and suitability for work: Current and proposed times were widely seen as unsuitable for commuters, with repeated requests for early morning departures and later afternoon or evening return trips.
- Capacity constraints: A dominant theme was the need for a larger bus, with many reporting being turned away due to lack of seats, particularly after Motuoapa pickups.
- Risk of being stranded: Some respondents avoid using the service altogether due to concern about not securing a return seat.
- Frequency and permanence: Calls were made for more frequent services, weekend trips (including Saturdays), and for the service to be made permanent rather than trial-based.
- Routing and stops: Suggestions included stops at Motuoapa, Taupō Hospital, Taupō Airport, and improved or clearer bus stop locations.
- Equity and isolation: Respondents emphasized Tūrangi's relative isolation and the role of the service in supporting mobility, ageing in place, employment access, road safety, and emissions reduction.
- Awareness and engagement: Some requested better communication, clearer information on pickup/drop-off points, and stronger engagement with the Tūrangi community.

Overall, while the service is highly valued and seen as having significant potential, feedback indicates that capacity, timing, and frequency are currently limiting its effectiveness, particularly for working-age residents.

2.3.1 Overall Comment and Recommendation

Consultation feedback showed strong community value for the Tūrangi–Taupō service, particularly for people without private vehicles, older residents, and those accessing shopping, medical appointments and social connections in Taupō. Use in the last six months was relatively evenly split (49% yes / 51% no), suggesting both an established user base and a sizeable group of potential users who are currently constrained by service design.

Across the survey, the most consistent barriers were infrequency (26 responses) and insufficient capacity (22 responses), followed by timetable fit (times and days). The free-text feedback reinforced these themes, with frequent reports of people being turned away due to full vehicles - especially when boarding after Motuoapa - and concern about being stranded in Taupō if a return seat is not available. Respondents also expressed a strong desire for commuter-oriented timing (early departures and later returns), additional service days (including Tuesday/Wednesday for SuperGold users), weekend services, and improved access to key destinations such as Taupō Hospital and the airport.

While these requests highlight unmet need, they also exceed what is operationally feasible at this time given vehicle and driver constraints, and the requirement to maintain reliability across the wider network.

<u>Recommended Service Change Package</u>
It is recommended that the following changes to the Tūrangi–Taupō service are implemented:

1. Increase service frequency from two to three return trips per week: Add an additional return service on Friday, resulting in services operating Monday, Thursday and Friday.

2. Operate all Tūrangi service days using a larger bus (replacing the shuttle): Transition all trips on the Tūrangi route to a larger vehicle to address persistent capacity constraints and reduce the incidence of passengers being left behind.
3. Implement the revised timetable (including minor post-consultation refinements): Proceed with the consulted timetable, noting that minor changes have been made following operator feedback. These amendments do not materially change the intent of the proposal or the feedback received.

Rationale for Recommendation

The recommended package prioritises the two most significant barriers identified through consultation: service frequency and insufficient seating capacity.

- Capacity and reliability are the most urgent issues to address: Survey results and open comments indicate frequent instances of the vehicle reaching capacity which discourages use and increases concern about being stranded in Taupō. Deploying a larger bus is the most direct and effective response to this issue.
- Friday is the most supported additional service day and is operationally feasible: When asked which additional day(s) would be used, Friday received the highest level of support. While some respondents (including SuperGold users) expressed a preference for Tuesday, the vehicle is scheduled to operate elsewhere on Tuesdays. Friday therefore represents the best alignment between community preference and operational availability.
- Timetable constraints reflect fleet utilisation and school transport commitments: Consultation feedback strongly requested earlier departures from Tūrangi and later returns from Taupō to support employment travel. These changes are not feasible at this time due to vehicle utilisation requirements:
    - Earlier inbound trips would require the vehicle to remain in Tūrangi overnight, which is not possible as the vehicle is used on other services.
    - As the service is moving to a larger bus to resolve capacity constraints, that bus must also meet school transport commitments in Taupō in the early morning and late afternoon, limiting the ability to extend operating hours.
- Shorter time in Taupō is a trade-off to achieve additional frequency and capacity: The revised timetable proposes approximately a two-hour layover in Taupō, compared to just over 3.5 hours currently. This change reflects the operational trade-off required to deliver a larger bus and an additional service day while maintaining fleet availability for school services. The recommendation therefore prioritises seat availability, reliability, and network deliverability over longer dwell time in Taupō.
- Airport access is better addressed through local Taupō services rather than the regional connector: While an airport stop was suggested, routing the Tūrangi service via Taupō Airport would create an unnecessary detour and reduce travel efficiency on a route intended to connect Tūrangi and Taupō as directly as possible. Airport connectivity should be considered through the local Taupō network or connecting services where detours can be accommodated more efficiently.

2.4 #37 Tokoroa / Mangakino

In response to increasing demand and capacity constraints on the Tokoroa–Mangakino corridor, we proposed increasing the number of weekly services between Tokoroa and Taupō from two to three, with the additional trip scheduled for Wednesday. We also proposed new trip times for all services, noting that trips *may* route via Kinloch, which would add approximately seven minutes to the journey. All trips were proposed to continue operating with the existing shuttle as a larger bus is unable to complete the return trips and be back in Taupō in time to meet school transport commitments on the Taupo Connector service.

The proposed timetable we consulted on is shown below.

The proposed timetable is below.

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Tokoroa	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	No service		7.50	1.40	7.50	1.40	No service		7.50	1.40
Kinloch			8.10	2.00	8.10	2.00			8.10	2.00
Mangakino			8.56	2.46	8.56	2.46			8.56	2.46
Whakamaru Village			9.07	2.57	9.07	2.57			9.07	2.57
Tokoroa			9.32	3.22	9.32	3.22			9.32	3.22
Tokoroa to Taupō										
Tokoroa			9.45	3.35	9.45	3.35			9.45	3.35
Whakamaru Village			10.15	4.05	10.15	4.05			10.15	4.05
Mangakino			10.34	4.24	10.34	4.24			10.34	4.24
Kinloch			11.20	5.10	11.20	5.10			11.20	5.10
Taupō			11.40	5.30	11.40	5.30			11.40	5.30

When asked “Have you used the Tokoroa/Mangakino service in the last six months?” 52.2% (35) of respondents answered “no” while 47.8% (32) of respondents answered "yes”. When asked “What do you usually use this service for (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 23 responses for ‘shopping’,
- 16 responses for ‘social and leisure’,
- 8 responses for ‘medical’,
- 3 responses for ‘work’,
- 2 responses for 'other’ and,
- 0 responses for ‘education’

We then asked “Which of the following trips would you take using the Tokoroa/Mangakino service? (Select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 16 responses for “To Taupō from Mangakino”
- 15 responses for “To Mangakino from Tokoroa”
- 14 responses for "To Mangakino from Taupō”
- 13 responses for "To Tokoroa from Mangakino”
- 7 responses for "To Taupō from Tokoroa” and,
- 5 responses for “To Tokoroa from Taupō”

The pattern of intended trips suggests the Tokoroa/Mangakino service is primarily being used (or is most valued) as a connector for Mangakino residents travelling to and from Taupō and Tokoroa. Interest in end-to-end travel between Tokoroa and Taupō is notably lower than travel involving Mangakino, indicating that the service functions more as two linked local markets (Mangakino–Taupō and Mangakino–Tokoroa) rather than a single inter-town route dominated by full corridor trips. Because this was multi-select, the counts reflect *relative interest* rather than a clean split of riders. But the ranking and gaps are still meaningful for interpreting travel behaviour.

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Tokoroa/Mangakino service more often? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 10 responses for ‘the service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 9 responses for ‘No barriers for me’,
- 8 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 8 responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’
- 6 responses for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’
- 2 responses for ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 1 response for ‘I don’t feel safe using it’,
- 1 response for 'other’ and,
- 0 people indicated responses for ‘I didn’t know this service existed’,

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above respondents highlighted the high personal value of the Tokoroa–Mangakino–Taupō service, particularly for individuals without access to a car, enabling them to attend medical appointments and complete essential shopping. However, several issues were raised:

- Insufficient time in Taupō: The current two-hour layover is seen as too short, especially given the long travel time, creating stress and limiting the ability to complete shopping or appointments. Some respondents suggested even a modest increase (e.g. 30 minutes) would help.
- Capacity constraints: The shuttle can be full on return legs, particularly when travelling from Tokoroa back toward Mangakino and Taupō, leading to concern about securing a seat.
- Travel efficiency concerns: Respondents noted the imbalance between long travel times and short periods at the destination.
- Suitability for different users: Long waits were highlighted as particularly difficult for older passengers, while others noted they use the service only occasionally.
- Interest in expanded service: Suggestions included weekday connections aligned with working hours and the possibility of weekend services.

Overall, feedback reflects strong reliance on the service for essential trips, but indicates that short dwell times, long travel durations, and occasional capacity issues reduce its practicality and comfort, particularly for older and vulnerable users.

When asked “What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Tokoroa/Mangakino service? (select all that apply)”, responses included:

- 11 responses for 'the service time(s) don’t suit me’,
- 9 responses for ‘No barriers for me’,
- 7 responses for ‘the service is too infrequent’,
- 7 responses for ‘the service day(s) don’t suit me’,
- 6 responses for ‘The bus isn’t big enough (not enough seating)’,
- 6 responses for ‘I didn’t know this service existed’,
- 6 responses for 'other’,
- 5 responses for ‘The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home’,
- 1 response for ‘I don’t feel safe using it’.

When asked to provide context to any of their answers to the question above respondents indicated that the short time allowed in Taupō is the main barrier to using the service. With travel times of around two hours each way, the current timetable leaves less than two hours in Taupō, which many feel is insufficient for appointments, shopping, or other activities—particularly for older users without private transport. Several respondents suggested a later return or at least an extra hour in Taupō to make the trip worthwhile. Additional feedback included calls for better public awareness of the service, clarity on pickup locations and accessibility, interest in weekend services, and questions about additional stops such as Mokai.

Regarding the additional day of service, we asked the community "Please pick which additional day(s) you would use the Tokoroa/Mangakino service if they became available (Select all that apply)" (the service currently operates Tuesday and Friday). 47 people selected Wednesday (the proposed additional day), 32 selected Thursday, and 21 selected Monday. Subsequently, it appears that the proposed additional service day being on a Wednesday is the preferred option.

We asked the community "Looking at the above proposed timetable, will your use of this service be negatively impacted by the proposed change in timetable?". 85.2% (52) of respondents answered 'no' while 14.8% (9) of respondents answered 'yes'.

When asked for final comments on the service, feedback reinforced the high value of the Tokoroa/Mangakino service as an essential transport option for communities with limited access to private vehicles, particularly older residents, families, and disabled users. Many described the service as a lifeline, enabling access to shopping, healthcare, and social connections. The most consistent concerns were:

- Insufficient time in Taupō, with two hours widely viewed as too short to justify the long travel time. Respondents requested earlier arrivals and later departures (e.g. around 4:00 pm) to allow a meaningful day trip.
- Capacity and vehicle size, with frequent calls for a bigger bus, especially during peak periods such as summer, to avoid crowding and passengers missing out.
- Accessibility issues, including steep and narrow stairs that limit use by older people and those with mobility impairments.
- Service frequency, with suggestions for a Monday-to-Friday service and, in some cases, weekend operations to better support employment, errands, and family visits.
- Route and stop suggestions, including requests to serve Mokai and minimise looping or detours that reduce time at destinations.

2.4.1 Overall Comment and Recommendations

Consultation feedback confirms that the Tokoroa–Mangakino–Taupō service provides essential access for communities with limited transport options, particularly older residents, disabled users, and those without access to a private vehicle. Almost half of respondents (47.8%) have used the service in the past six months, while the remaining responses indicate considerable latent demand constrained by service design rather than lack of need.

Current use is concentrated on Mangakino-based trips, with the service primarily functioning as a connector for Mangakino residents travelling to and from Taupō and Tokoroa. Interest in full end-to-end travel between Tokoroa and Taupō is comparatively lower, suggesting the route operates as two linked travel markets rather than a single inter-town commuter corridor. Across both quantitative and qualitative responses, the most consistently identified barriers were:

- Short time in Taupō, with the current layover of less than two hours widely viewed as insufficient given the long travel time.
- Infrequency, with strong support for additional service days.
- Capacity constraints, with multiple respondents experiencing or anticipating full vehicles, particularly on return trips.
- Accessibility challenges, including bus ingress/egress difficulties for older and mobility-impaired users.
- Desire for expanded service, including weekday commuter-style trips and weekend services, which reflect broader unmet mobility needs but extend beyond current operational constraints.

While these concerns are significant, it is notable that 85.2% of respondents indicated that the proposed timetable changes would not negatively impact their use, and there was clear support for adding an additional service day - Wednesday being the preferred option.

To note is that the proposed timetable that was used in the consultation included a diversion via Kinloch (see the Kinloch section), however, as per the subsequence recommendation to *not* divert via Kinloch due to capacity constraints, the final timetable is therefore different from what was proposed and is shown below.

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Mangakino / Tokoroa	**AM**	**PM**	**AM**	**PM**	**AM**	**PM**	**AM**	**PM**	**AM**	**PM**
Depart Taupo	No service		8:30	13:15	9:10	14:30	No service		8:30	13:15
Arrive Mangakino			9:29	14:14	10:09	15:29			9:29	14:14
Arrive Whakamaru Village			9:40	14:25	10:20	15:40			9:40	14:25
Arrive Tokoroa			10:05	14:50	10:45	16:05			10:05	14:50
Depart Tokoroa			10:15	15:00	10:55	16:15			10:15	15:00
Arrive Whakamaru Village			10:45	15:30	11:10	16:45			10:45	15:30
Arrive Managakino			11:04	15:49	11:44	17:04			11:04	15:49
Arrive Taupo			11:50	16:35	12:30	17:50			11:50	16:35

Recommendation

Based on the feedback received, we recommend proceeding with the proposed changes to the Tokoroa/Mangakino service as consulted (with minor timetable changes as explained above), with the following approach:

- Increase weekly services from two to three return trips, adding a Wednesday service: This responds directly to the most commonly identified barrier - service infrequency - and aligns with community preference, with Wednesday receiving the highest level of support as an additional service day.
- Implement the revised timetable, excluding the potential routing via Kinloch: The proposed timetable is supported by the majority of users and enables improved service coverage within existing operational constraints. As per recommendations identified in the Kinloch section of this report, the detour via Kinloch is not proposed due to capacity constraints.
- Continue operating the service using the existing shuttle: While feedback strongly favoured a larger vehicle, this is not operationally feasible at this time. The shuttle must continue to be used as a larger bus cannot complete the Tokoroa/Mangakino return trips and still return to Taupō in time to meet school transport commitments on the Taupō Connector service. Maintaining a reliable, deliverable service is therefore prioritised.
- Acknowledge the Taupō layover trade-off and monitor impacts: Feedback indicates a desire for longer time in Taupō. However, within current fleet and scheduling constraints, extending the layover would compromise service deliverability or frequency. The proposed changes prioritise additional service days and network reliability over longer dwell time. It is recommended that layover adequacy and customer impacts continue to be monitored for future review.
- Position further enhancements as future considerations: Feedback regarding weekend services, expanded weekday travel, improved accessibility, additional stops (e.g. Mokai), and increased awareness should inform longer-term planning, subject to fleet capacity, funding, and trial outcomes.

Rationale

This recommendation strikes a deliberate balance between community need and operational feasibility. Feedback demonstrates strong reliance on the service for essential trips, particularly for Mangakino residents, and clear support for increased frequency. Adding an additional service day provides a meaningful improvement that is deliverable within current constraints, without compromising the reliability of other routes.

While concerns regarding dwell time, capacity and accessibility remain, these reflect structural constraints rather than issues that can be resolved immediately. Deferring frequency improvements in favour of attempting timetable perfection would limit the service's usefulness for many users and fail to respond to the strongest signal from consultation - that more days matter most. Proceeding with the proposed changes therefore represents a proportionate and justified response to feedback, while creating a stronger evidence base for future decisions on service permanence and enhancement.

2.5 #38 Wairakei

Due to increasing demand on the Tokoroa and Tūrangi routes, we identified the need to reallocate vehicles across the network. For Wairakei, we proposed removing Friday services between Taupō and Wairakei, reducing the number of weekly return trips from five to four, and adjusting Tuesday's service time to align with other operating days, as those times had demonstrated stronger usage. We also proposed operating two service days (Tuesday and Wednesday) with a larger bus, while retaining a shuttle bus on Monday and Thursday. Patronage data showed that Friday and Tuesday were the least-used days, so services were proposed to continue on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

The proposed timetable we consulted on is shown below.

The proposed timetable is below.

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Taupō to Wairakei	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
Taupō	9.45	1.30	9.45	1.30	9.45	1.30	9.45	1.30	No service	
Wairakei	10.10	1.35	10.10	1.35	10.10	1.35	10.10	1.35		
Wairakei to Taupō										
Wairakei	10.11	1.56	10.11	1.56	10.11	1.56	10.11	1.56		
Taupō	10.30	2.15	10.30	2.15	10.30	2.15	10.30	2.15		

When asked "Have you used the Wairakei service in the last six months?" 76.9% (10) of respondents answered "no" while 23.1% (3) of respondents answered "yes". When asked "What do you usually use this service for (select all that apply)", responses included:

- 2 responses for 'social and leisure',
- 1 response for 'shopping',
- 1 response for 'work' and,
- 0 responses for 'education', 'medical' or 'other'.

When asked "What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Wairakei service more often? (select all that apply)", responses included:

- 2 responses for 'the service time(s) don't suit me',
- 1 response for 'the service is too infrequent', and
- 0 people indicated responses for 'I didn't know this service existed', 'No barriers for me', 'the service day(s) don't suit me', 'The bus isn't big enough (not enough seating)', 'The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home', 'I don't feel safe using it' and, 'other'.

When asked to provide further information to the above question, one response supported making the trip times consistent throughout the week but flagged a preference for more time (4 hours) in Taupo. One respondent requested the timetable revert to its original/current timetable.

When asked "What barriers, if any, are there to you using the Wairakei service? (select all that apply)", responses included:

- 4 responses for 'the service time(s) don't suit me',
- 3 responses for 'The bus stop is inaccessible/too far away from my home',
- 2 responses for 'the service is too infrequent',
- 2 responses for 'No barriers for me',
- 1 response for 'the service day(s) don't suit me'
- 1 response for 'The bus isn't big enough (not enough seating)'
- 1 response for 'I didn't know this service existed',
- 1 response for 'other' and,
- 0 people indicated responses for 'I don't feel safe using it'

When asked to provide more context to the above answers, respondents highlighted several issues influencing their ability to use the Wairakei service more often. Some noted a lack of awareness about bus stop locations, while others explained that the current timetable does not suit work hours, particularly for those commuting between Tūrangi and Wairākei on a 7am–4pm schedule. A desire for weekend services (e.g., for golf or leisure) was also mentioned. One respondent noted that the service is appreciated by older residents who do not use online tools, as it provides an important alternative when they are unable to drive or have vehicle difficulties, helping them feel connected rather than isolated.

When asked “would the removal of Friday trips negatively impact you?”, 57.1% (8) of the respondents answered ‘No’ while 42.9% (6) of the respondents answered 'Yes’. When asked “Looking at the above proposed timetable, will your use of this service be negatively impacted by the proposed change in timetable?”, 78.6% (11) of respondents answered ‘No’, while 21.4% (3) of respondents answered 'Yes’.

When asked to provide an overall comment on the Wairakei service, respondents expressed overall appreciation for the Wairakei service, noting that it provides an important travel option for residents who may not have access to a car. Several people praised the drivers as friendly and helpful and indicated they intend to use the service more. However, feedback also highlighted that the current timetable does not support work commuters, with strong suggestions to better align trips with standard working hours. One respondent opposed the removal of the Friday service, noting it is valuable to the community. There were also suggestions for routing improvements, including the possibility of the bus stopping at Wairakei on the way to Tokoroa.

2.5.1 Overall Comment and Recommendations

Feedback on the Wairakei service indicates that while overall usage is low, the service is valued by the community, particularly by residents without access to a private vehicle and older people who rely on it to remain connected and independent. Several respondents praised the drivers and expressed appreciation for the service continuing to operate. However, feedback also highlighted several key barriers that limit more frequent use:

- Service times do not align with standard working hours, particularly for people commuting between Wairakei and nearby areas like Tūrangi.
- Accessibility and stop location issues, with some respondents unaware of where bus stops are or finding them too far from home.
- Desire for weekend services for leisure and social trips.
- Mixed views on the removal of Friday trips, with 57.1% stating it would not negatively affect them and 42.9% stating it would.

Despite these concerns, the majority (78.6%) indicated that the proposed timetable changes would not negatively affect their ability to use the service. There was also support for having consistent trip times across the week, and feedback confirmed that Friday and Tuesday are the least-used days, aligning with the patronage data used to shape the proposal.

<u>Recommendation</u>

It is recommended that the proposed service changes for Wairakei proceed as consulted:

1. Remove Friday services, reducing weekly return trips from five to four. This reflects both patronage data (Friday being one of the two least-used days) and the majority of feedback indicating no negative impact.
2. Align Tuesday’s service time with the other operating days. This responds directly to feedback supporting consistent timing across the week and improves usability.
3. Operate Tuesday and Wednesday services with a larger bus, and Monday and Thursday with a shuttle. This balances vehicle availability and operational efficiency.

Rationale

This recommendation carefully balances community needs, service performance, and network-wide operational constraints:

- Vehicle reallocation is necessary due to growing demand on the Tokoroa and Tūrangi routes, both of which have higher patronage and more significant capacity challenges.
- Wairakei patronage is low, with only three respondents having used the service in the last six months, and use focused primarily on social and shopping trips rather than essential work or medical travel.
- Friday and Tuesday are the least-used days, consistent with both feedback and long-term patronage data, making Friday removal a proportionate and evidence-based adjustment. The timetable adjustment to align the Tuesday trip time with the other days of the week will hopefully improve patronage on Tuesdays while also ensuring a consistent Monday to Thursday timetable.
- The majority of respondents will not be negatively impacted by the proposed timetable, and feedback confirms that the core service remains useful and appreciated.
- Weekend and commuter-oriented services, while requested by some, cannot be delivered within current fleet and budget constraints, and broader improvements must be considered as part of future planning rather than immediate changes.

Overall, the recommended changes maintain access for those who rely on the Wairakei service, while enabling necessary vehicle redistribution to routes with higher demand pressures - resulting in a more efficient and effective network across Connect-2-Taupō.

3 Costs

To implement the proposed changes to the Connect-2-Taupo services (in particular - increasing service days on the two longest routes) does come at an increase in operating costs. Below is the indicative cost of these changes. Overall, it is expected that these changes will result in an increase of the annual operating cost of the contract by $38,923.

This cost falls within the existing operating budget of the contract and is considered acceptable to WRC staff.

	Change to kms	Change to hours	Costs
Mankakino/Tororoa	20,073.09	332.93	$ 28,345.38
Wairakei	-2,313.00	-80.97	-$ 814.77
Kinloch	0.00	-8.67	-$ 346.11
Acacia Bay	-1,750.32	-122.43	-$ 6,200.15
Turangi	10,961.00	267.61	$ 17,939.17
Total changes and overall cost	26,970.77	388.47	**$ 38,923.53**

4 Next Steps and Implementation

Should WRC proceed with these changes, they can be implemented in May 2026 as part of Councils next network / GTFS update.

5 Future Considerations

While the proposed service recommendations address the most immediate operational pressures within the Connect-2-Taupō network, they do not resolve all underlying challenges. Several communities continue to experience service limitations due to fleet constraints, competing demand pressures, and the need to prioritise reliability across the wider network. As funding and vehicle availability improve, a more comprehensive review will be required to determine long-term network design options that better support community needs, commuter travel patterns, and opportunities for growth.

Acacia Bay is a key example where short-term adjustments have been driven by operational necessity rather than a lack of future potential. The reduction in service frequency is intended to free up vehicle capacity in response to growing demand elsewhere, but there remains a need to reassess long-term demand in the area. A return to three (or more) weekly trips should be considered if an additional vehicle becomes available, alongside a broader review of timetable performance and opportunities for enhancement.

For Kinloch, a future diversion of the Tokoroa service may be feasible, but only once a larger vehicle is introduced to that route. Similarly, both Tūrangi and Tokoroa/Mangakino show strong potential for more commuter-oriented timetables, daily service options, and improved layover or dwell times in Taupō. While the proposed changes improve service days for Tūrangi, they also reduce the available time in Taupō - an unavoidable trade-off under current resource constraints. This will need ongoing monitoring, with a view to restoring longer Taupō layover times as resources allow.

Communities such as Wairakei also warrant a future shift toward commuter-focused timetables, reinstatement of daily trips, and weekend options. In addition, wider network adjustments - such as reviewing the Taupō Connector to consider an airport diversion and exploring whether the Tokoroa

Connector could extend to Mangakino or help share the Tokoroa–Taupō travel load - will be important components of a more holistic network redesign.

Overall, while the current changes make the best use of limited resources, there remains significant opportunity to improve service coverage, capacity, and commuter suitability across the Taupō area. A more detailed network-wide assessment will be essential to support the next stage of development and public transport expansion and improvement for the area.

6.4 CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND NZTA WORK PLAN

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Katherine Simpson, Public Transport Planner**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report updates the Subcommittee on the Central Government and NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) works plans in the public transport (PT) operating environment.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Aspects of the Central Government work plan for second half of FY 2025/26 that affect the PT operating environment include:
   a. Local Government Reform, Resource Management Law Reform and Rates Capping
   b. Establishment of the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT)
   c. Ministry of Transport's Proposals to Strengthen the Total Mobility Scheme

3. NZTA's 2025/2026 work programme affecting the PT working environment has been progressively delivered through the Public Transport Shared Sector Initiatives (SSI) workstreams; which include:
   a. Tackling system setting challenges (SSI 1)
   b. Enhancing value for money through procurement (SSI 2)
   c. Data optimisation and digital enablement (SSI 3)
   d. Developing sector good practice (SSI 4)
   e. Supporting delivery of National Ticketing Solution (SSI 5)

4. Another final deliverable that stems directly from the NZTA work programme for this year is the allocation of the Bus Driver Fund.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Central Government and NZTA work plan* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

Features of Central Government's work plan for second half of FY 2025/26

Local Government Reform, Resource Management Law Reform and Rates Capping

5. As summarised elsewhere on this agenda, in late 2025 the Government released a draft proposal that outlines significant structural reform to the governance and delivery of regional functions across New Zealand. Elected members will also be aware that at this time the Government signalled its intention to enact legislation during 2026 to set a target range for annual rates increases, based on long-term economic indicators like inflation (low) and GDP growth (high) to be law for 2027. (rates capping).

6. Also at the same time the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill were introduced to Parliament. Working in tandem, once passed the bills will replace the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA). The purpose of the Planning Bill is to establish a framework for planning and regulating the use, development and enjoyment of land. The purpose of the Natural Environment Bill is to manage impacts from the use of natural resources and protect the environment from harm. The Planning Bill is significant for achieving land-use and transport integration.

7. Although on slightly different time-lines, collectively the reforms will likely impact on the activities of the Subcommittee in this triennium as, and when, they come to full fruition.

Establishment of the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport (MCERT)

8. On 16 December 2025 the Minister of Housing, Transport, RMA Reform and Infrastructure announced the establishment of a new Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT), to support the Government's reform agenda in housing, transport, urban development and the environment.

9. The new Ministry will bring together the Ministry for the Environment, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Transport, and local government functions from the Department of Internal Affairs into one new agency.

10. The establishment of MCERT is intended to support the current Government's complex policy reforms underway across multiple areas, including Going for Housing Growth, a renewed emphasis on transit-oriented development, congestion pricing and the transition to electronic road user charges for all vehicles, and City and Regional Deals.

11. It is anticipated that having the grouping of responsibilities that impact successful PT planning and delivery in one Ministry will ultimately support and strengthen the work that is the focus of this the Subcommittee. However, there may be a period of some instability in coming months as the new Ministry forms.

Ministry of Transport's Proposals to Strengthen the Total Mobility Scheme

12. Total Mobility is a national transport assistance scheme that helps disabled & elderly people with long- or short-term impairments to access alternative transport options when public transport is not accessible to them.

13. Since 2022 Total Mobility across New Zealand has seen significant increases in usages, expenditure and changes in user behaviour (longer and more frequent trips). The trigger point in 2022 for these changes was an increase in the level of government subsidy of Total Mobility trips from 50% to 75%.

14. Due to the subsequent financial pressure of the provision of Total Mobility services, the Government has announced it will reduce the fare subsidy level from the current 75 percent down to 65 percent of the maximised subsided fare cap from 1 July 2026. Government has also directed NZTA to work with public transport authorities to lower the fare caps and the maximum subsidy by approximately 10 percent.

15. The Ministry of Transport (MoT) has also opened consultation on broader improvements to the Total Mobility scheme. The subsidy reduction and lowering of the maximum subsidy cap not part of the consultation, rather feedback is being sought on how the scheme could be improved by:

    a. Clarifying Total Mobility's purpose and make eligibility assessments more consistent. MoT would like to see a clearer purpose statement and to strengthen the process to enter the scheme – and more regular checks that people still qualify for the scheme.

    b. Introducing more targeted support allocations for Total Mobility. This includes ways to incentivise more wheelchair accessible trips and options to limit the number of subsidised trips a user can take.

    c. Promoting innovation in how Total Mobility is delivered, including enabling new types of providers to enter the scheme, such as ride-hail services like Uber and other forms of transport to meet the needs of Total Mobility users. a national public transport concession for people with disabilities.

16. The consultation on the Proposal to Strengthen Total Mobility is open until 22 March 2026. Waikato Regional Council will submit on the proposal. Regional Council is also working with NZTA to identify a preferred proposal for reducing its maximised subsidised fare. This varies across the areas in Waikato where the Total Mobility scheme operates, being Hamilton City, Waikato District, Waipā District, Matamata-Piako District, Thames-Coromandel District, Taupō District & Tokoroa.

17. Currently, subsidy maximum caps that apply are:

Hamilton, Thames Coromandel, Hauraki District & Tokoroa: subsidy up to	$22.50 per trip
Taupō and Waipā: subsidy up to	$18.75 per trip
Matamata-Piako: subsidy up to	$60 per trip
Waikato District: subsidy up to	$75 per trip

18. Total Mobility scheme users, many of whom would be among the Region's most transport disadvantaged, will pay a higher proportion of their trips from 1 July 2026.

19. Regional Council transport staff are liaising with Total Mobility users and will be providing communications ahead of July 2026 to explain what the subsidy change will mean in practice for Waikato Total Mobility Scheme users, including how the scheme may evolve following national consultation.

Features of NZTA's 2025/2026 work programme

Tackling system setting challenges (SSI 1)

20. The SSI 1 workstream tackling system setting challenges comprises six deliverables. Three relate to private share being the review and setting of private share targets and two related research papers. The first research paper is on quantifying private/public benefits of the New Zealand PT system. The second research paper is around third party funding initiatives.

21. Additionally, NZTA is working to improve PT programme alignment nationally; optimise PT investment policy and rules; and to prepare a white paper on increasing cost efficiency in

sector service delivery functions through improved integration. These three pieces of work are all planned for Qs 2 to 4.

22. NZTA's review and (re)set private share targets is progressing as planned. It is a full year piece of work. Both research papers were due to be completed in Q3, but currently the work to quantify the private versus public benefits of NZ's PT system is behind schedule. It is not clear what impact a late delivery of this work will have.

Enhancing value for money through procurement (SSI 2)

23. The SSI2 workstream comprises eight pieces of work aiming to improve and streamline PT procurement and contracting procedures and practice. Three of the workstreams are around the Requirements for Urban Buses (RUB) implementation guidelines, which were published in December, and a review of vehicle interior standards and an update of the vehicle average age requirement. Changes to the RUB can affect passenger comfort and enjoyment but can also have both upside, and downside, risk for contracting of new/renewal of services, as is currently undertaking across much of the Region.

24. Part of this workstream has also involved the updating of the PT Procurement Procedures Manual (PT – PPM). NZTA consulted on the draft PT-PPM late last year and it has now been finalised, but is awaiting publication. The PT-PPM will provide clearer and more tailored and focused procurement procedures to better support regional councils/PTAs. Alongside this workstream NZTA has been co-developing a case of change for better bus procurement in conjunction with a sector reference group.

25. The remaining workstreams support improved procurement practices and procedures including standardising key contracting elements; developing a standardised procurement strategy and operating contract template, this workstream being co-developed with Waikato Regional Council. Finally there is a piece of work being undertaken in conjunction with Auckland Transport, Greater Wellington and Canterbury Regional Councils around optimising ownership and investment models for bus depots.

Data optimisation and digital enablement (SSI 3)

26. The SSI3 workstream comprises five pieces of work. Two scoping for two - the national roadmap for integration and optimisation of technology systems, and a sector business intelligence solution trial, has been completed and awaiting a decision/approval within NZTA to move to a next stage.

27. For a third piece of work, the National Total Mobility administration system, NZTA has begun due diligence. This is an internally focused workstream to assess the potential legal and security risks and liability for if/when NZTA takes on the administration of Total Mobility.

28. Work on reviewing and updating the PT customer satisfaction survey methodology has been delayed, and a final piece of work, to establish a PT sector data forum, is yet to be fully scoped.

Developing sector good practice (SSI 4)

29. The SSI4 workstream comprises the co-development of three guidance material (best practice) and tools for:

    a. Node and catchment assessment

    b. Demand responsive PT frameworks

    c. Updating Total Mobility

30. These pieces of work are programmed to be completed either later this year or into 2026/27, with updating Total Mobility guidance being impacted by the current MoT consultation.

Supporting delivery of National Ticketing Solution (SSI 5)

31. This SSI comprises a single workstream to explore standardising the accessibility and education concessions to be applied with NTS. The project was a request of the NTS Governing Body but it has not been commenced.

Bus Driver Fund

32. The Bus Driver Safety Fund is a NZTA programme that provides funding to enhance bus driver safety, wellbeing, and facilities, supporting driver attraction and retention.

33. Waikato Regional Council in collaboration with South Waikato District Council and Hamilton City Council, secured funding for two projects under the fund: a Driver Toilet Facility along SH1 in Tokoroa and additional bus shelter lighting across Hamilton City.

34. The Hamilton City lighting project is now in the completion stage, while the South Waikato driver facility is in delivery and on track for completion by the end of the month.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

35. There are several moving parts at both the legislative and structural level of the public transport operating environment and at the delivery level.

36. Staff will continue to update the Subcommittee on changes and developments as the changes play out. At the legislative and structural level these are likely to be over the medium to longer term, but still within the current triennium. The impact of changes and activities at the operational level will continue to be reported and the Subcommittee's guidance sought, as required.

NGĀ TOHUTORO | REFERENCES

37. Type here

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.5 TE HUIA UPDATE

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **James Llewellyn, Contractor**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on work related to the Te Huia Interregional Passenger Rail service.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. This report provides an update on progress of various projects within the Te Huia programme, namely:
   a. Extension of trial until June 2027.
   b. Process to enable Te Huia to become a permanent service funded through the public transport continuous programme.
   c. New safety case for the current carriages so that they can continue to operate from 01 May 2025.
   d. Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) which is investigating longer-term options for improving Te Huia (including journey speed, frequency and new stations).
   e. The next phase of investigation into new rolling stock to replace the current carriages which date from the 1970s and will become life expired within ten years. In the context of the 'Simplifying Local Government' proposals, insight is sought from the Subcommittee to help WRC understand the appetite of the proposed Combined Territories Board (or future local government entity) to continuing the rolling stock investment process.
3. The most significant decision is that Waikato Regional Council and NZTA have agreed to co-fund a one-year extension to the Te Huia interregional passenger rail trial service.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Te Huia Update* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

4. Te Huia is the interregional passenger rail service which connects the Waikato region with Auckland. The service has been running as a trial since April 2021, with a hiatus between August 2021 and January 2022 because of the Auckland COVID-19 lockdown. There are currently three return journeys on Thursdays and Fridays; two on Monday – Wednesday and Saturday; and one on Sunday. Between April 2021 and December 2025, a total of 278,321 one-way passenger trips have taken place on Te Huia.
5. Te Huia has been funded by New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and Waikato Regional Council (WRC), with strong support from Hamilton City and Waikato District Councils who provided new stations and infrastructure prior to launch. The service is operated under a Rail Services Agreement (RSA) with KiwiRail.

6. The Te Huia programme is made up of several projects:
    a. End of trial review and evaluation, including a one-year extension until June 2027.
    b. Transition to permanent service.
    c. New safety case for the current carriages.
    d. Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC).
    e. New rolling stock.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

Extension of Trial to June 2027

7. Funding for Te Huia was due to end on 30 June 2026.

8. Following a request from WRC, the NZTA Board agreed to fund a one-year extension to the trial at 60% Financial Assistance Rate (FAR) at its meeting on 19 February 2026. With this support, WRC agreed to provide the local share to extend the trial until 30 June 2027 at its Annual Plan meeting on 25 February. WRC is now working with KiwiRail to extend the Rail Services Agreement for a further twelve months.

End of Trial Review

Alongside discussions about extending the trial, an end of trial review and evaluation report (see Attachment 1) was prepared by WRC in February 2026. The review, which was also reported to WRCs Annual Plan meeting, concluded that Te Huia has met six of its eight performance targets and is within 10% of achieving a seventh:

Table 1: Progress Towards Meeting Te Huia KPI Targets

KPI	Description	Performance: T = Target and A = Actual									
		2021*		2022		2023		2024		2025	
		T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
1a	Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	167	137	190	209	250	261	250	307	250	263
1b	Average Saturday demand (passengers per day)	42	295	75	238	100	210	250	281	250	283
1c	Amended target: Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	-	-	-	-	400	261	400	307	400	263
2	On-time trips arriving within 5 minutes (%)	90	96.8	90	84.6	90	68.5	90	84.8	90	85.3
3	Farebox Recovery (%)	-	-	7.6	6.0	15.0	13.4	15.0	15.4	15.0	17.9
4	Scheduled trips delivered (%)	99	98.4	99	98.6	99	98.3	99	98.6	99	99.3
5	Delayed trips within 15 minutes of timetable (%)	95	98.0	95	93.4	95	92.8	95	95.5	95	96.3
6	Overall customer satisfaction (%)	-	-	90	94	90	98	90	99	90	98

* Incomplete year four months (April to August 2021)

Colours:

Meets or exceeds target
Within 10% of target
Over 10% below target

9. The Te Huia trial extension means that the end of trial review and evaluation report will revert to “interim” status and be updated in a year’s time with data from the 2026 calendar year. The report will then be submitted to the NZTA Board as part of the process of deciding whether to make Te Huia permanent. It will also be used by WRC as part of the public

consultation into the future of Te Huia to be undertaken as part of the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan (LTP).

Process to transition to a permanent service

10. Any public transport service which moves from trial to permanent status has to be funded by both WRC and NZTA through the continuous programme (a key aspect of the National Land Transport Programme).

11. Now that the one year trial extension has been agreed, discussions around funding for a permanent service will take place as part of the next LTP, Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP) and National Land Transport Programme (NLTP). If funding is agreed for a permanent service through the continuous programme, this will require:

    a. A short-term (likely three to five year) extension to the current RSA with KiwiRail.

    b. A longer-term procurement for an operator to run the service; likely to be in conjunction with new rolling stock (see item below).

12. There are several options for longer-term procurement, which could either be based on a competitive tendering process or else the Auckland Metro service operator (currently Auckland One Rail) agreeing to take over Te Huia.

13. Any further work on the permanent service can only take place if and when both NZTA and WRC agree to fund it through the continuous programme.

New Safety Case

14. As the rail regulator, NZTA requires a new safety case to be in place from 01 May 2026. Trains cannot run without a safety case being signed off by NZTA. To that end, KiwiRail has undertaken a number of crashworthiness tests to establish whether additional safety work is required so that the 1970s-built carriages can be brought up to today's standards – so far as is reasonably practicable (SFAIRP).

15. KiwiRail issued their SFAIRP statement to NZTA on 20 February, and a decision from the regulator is awaited at the time of writing this report. The SFAIRP statement proposes that a safety case is granted for ten years, although this is not guaranteed. Depending on the NZTA decision, further investment in safety work may be required to be undertaken within a specified timeframe.

16. In addition to work on the carriages, KiwiRail is installing European Train Control System (ETCS) to DL locomotives that will replace the current DFBs. ETCS is an additional safety system which aims to provide advance warning of the potential for a signal passed at danger (SPAD). ETCS installation is in addition to the existing Automatic Train Protection (ATP) which applies the train brakes if a SPAD occurs.

Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC)

17. The current Te Huia service, whilst significantly improved compared to the original timetable is still relatively slow and infrequent. Therefore, a Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) has been commissioned by WRC to assess longer-term improvement proposals for Te Huia. These proposals could include:

    a. More frequent services between Hamilton and Auckland.

    b. Lower journey times, moving towards two hours one-way from Hamilton to Auckland.

    c. Rail infrastructure improvements (track and signalling).

d. New stations, potentially including Hamilton Central, Hamilton Airport, Ngāruawāhia, Te Kauwhata, Tuakau and Pokeno.

e. Replacement trains to enable the optimum service frequency to be delivered (see also rolling stock item below).

18. The scope of the SSBC excludes extensions south (to Te Awamutu / Otorohanga / Te Kuiti) and east (to Morrinsville / Tauranga).

19. Technical work underway to support the SSBC includes:

a. Passenger demand forecasting.

b. Train service specification and costing.

c. Line speed improvements assessment and costing.

d. Economic assessment (benefits versus costs).

e. Wider economic benefits and impacts on land use.

f. Funding and financing.

20. The SSBC is due to be completed by mid-2026 and is entirely funded by WRC. Following completion, there will be further discussions with NZTA as to the next steps for potential investment in service improvements.

New Rolling Stock

21. If a new safety case for the Te Huia carriages is approved by NZTA, it is likely be limited to ten years (or possibly less) from 01 May 2026. Therefore, if Te Huia becomes a permanent service, at some point in future the current carriages and locomotives must be replaced.

22. WRC commissioned a Detailed Business Case (DBC) in 2024 which recommended three 4-car battery electric multiple units (BEMUs) to replace the current carriages. The estimated cost in 2024 prices was around $114 million. However, it is highly likely that the Future Services SSBC (see item above) will recommend higher service frequencies to attract more fare paying passengers. In this scenario additional trains and depot capacity will be required and hence the existing DBC will be out of date.

23. Depending on the preferred option taken forward by the SSBC, WRC could require between eight and ten new trains (likely four to five car multiple units), and so a revised DBC is essential in order to understand the costs versus benefits and determine a deliverable investment programme.

24. Following agreement to extend the Te Huia trial by a further year, at the WRC Annual Plan meeting on 25 February, staff then presented a Strategic Investment Proposal (SIP) for $550,000 to be invested in updating the rolling stock DBC in 2026-27, which would include:

a. Technical specifications including traction systems, door heights (relative to the platforms) and gauge clearance (for tunnels and overbridges).

b. Functional specifications for interior layout, lighting, heating, air conditioning, seating, door configuration and passenger facilities (such as toilets, wheelchair spaces and luggage racks).

c. Depot location, capacity and facilities for the required number of trains and equipment such as chargers.

d. Robust capital and operating cost estimates for the preferred rolling stock option based on the required technical and functional specifications.

e. Investigation of third-party funding and financing (leasing) options to address ownership risks.

f. Market engagement with rolling stock manufacturers to understand likely commercial deals and costs.

25. At the Annual Plan meeting most Councillors took the view that funding and delivering the DBC technical work in 2026-27 may be premature given that Te Huia is still a trial. However, there are some compelling reasons why it is highly advisable to undertake the work as soon as possible:

a. Delivery into service of new trains takes at a minimum of five years from placing an order, and if the safety case variation for the current carriages is less than the requested ten years there could be a serious risk of them being withdrawn in advance of a replacement. In a worst case scenario this could leave Te Huia with no trains, and the service would cease to operate.

b. There is an option for Te Huia to conclude a contract with the supplier of the 18 BEMUs which have been ordered by Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) for services on the Manawatu and Wairarapa lines. Using this contract has the potential to save a substantial amount of procurement costs to WRC (likely to be in the millions). However, this procurement option time limited. If the DBC is not completed in 2026-27, it will be too late to proceed with the GWRC supplier and WRC will instead need to fund its own procurement process at considerable expense.

c. Any 2026-27 Crown budget bid for new trains would require sponsorship from the Minister for Rail supported by a robust DBC. WRC missed out on a Crown budget bid opportunity in 2025-26 partly because there was not an up-to-date business case available. Therefore, updating the DBC could put Te Huia at the front of the queue for investment consideration.

d. If funding for rolling stock pre-implementation work is to be included in the LTP and RLTP, the DBC will need to be updated as soon as possible. Failure to do so may result in further delays to essential preparatory work and the need for a subsequent RLTP variation. It would be highly desirable to include a robust assessment of these costs in the forthcoming LTP and RLTP.

e. Any rolling stock order from WRC will be very small by global standards and, if a DBC is completed in 2026-27, there may be an opportunity to partner with another Public Transport Authority (PTA) and obtain a better deal through economies of scale.

f. There are several options for funding and financing trains which mean that WRC may not need to assume the risk of owning rolling stock. Prompt completion of the DBC will enable these options – and their relative costs – to be understood in time for the next LTP.

26. An added complexity to the rolling stock investment decision is uncertainty due to the current central government ‘Simplifying Local Government’ consultation. Included within this is a proposal to establish Combined Territories Boards (CTBs) - comprised of mayors from each Council - who will work on a new local government structure to replace the existing one.

27. The challenge for a long-term investment decision such as Te Huia rolling stock – where work will take place over several years - is that a mandated legal entity will need to conclude a contract with a supplier, and have sufficient budget to undertake the necessary technical, commercial and legal activities. Furthermore, any elected representatives of this entity will need to agree that it is a high investment priority and commit to implementing the programme.

28. Under section 13 of the Land Transport Management Act (LTMA) 2003, WRC has legal responsibility for ensuring that the Regional Transport Committee (RTC) prepares the next RLTP and the programme of proposed investments within it. This programme could include new rolling stock for Te Huia.

29. Insight is therefore sought from the Subcommittee to help WRC understand the appetite of the proposed Combined Territories Board (or future local government entity) to continuing the rolling stock investment process.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

30. This report has set out the current position regarding various projects that collectively make up the Te Huia programme. As a rail service, Te Huia has become an integral part of the Waikato region transport network and the next six to 12 months will be crucial for decisions around its future.

31. Particularly important will be the end of trial review – now scheduled for early next year – the Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) and progressing replacement rolling stock following (assumed) granting of a new safety case.

1.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Te Huia End of Trial Review and Evaluation Report ⇩

Te Huia: Hamilton to Auckland Interregional Passenger Rail Service

End of Trial Review and Evaluation

February 2026

James Llewellyn, Programme Manager, Waikato Regional Council

Doc #34504281

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by Waikato Regional Council (WRC) to fulfil the requirement to provide an end of trial review and evaluation report to the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) Board. The document has been prepared on the expectation that it will be reported to the 02 April 2026 NZTA Board meeting. However, if the trial period for Te Huia is extended by a further year, then the status of the report may revert to a further interim performance assessment. In this situation the final end of trial review and evaluation report will be prepared in early 2027.

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Version Control

Version	Date	Purpose	Approval
1	02 February 2026	First draft for Programme Board	Phil King
2	16 February 2026	Final draft	Phil King
3	17 February 2026	Final	Phil King

Contents

Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to undertake a comprehensive review and evaluation of the Te Huia Interregional Passenger Rail service, which has operated on a trial basis since April 2021. The trial has been funded by both New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and local government partners.

The Huia started as two weekday peak hour return journeys per day between Hamilton (Frankton) and Papakura, with intermediate station calls at Rotokauri and Huntly; with a direct service to Auckland (The Strand) on Saturdays. From January 2022 the weekday service was extended to Auckland (The Strand) and subsequent timetable changes led to introduction of an afternoon departure to Auckland (replacing one of the morning services) and a morning departure from the Super City. An additional station call at Puhinui (for Auckland Airport) was added. In February 2024 an additional return service was introduced on Thursdays and Fridays, as well as a second Saturday round trip. In February 2025 the Papakura station call was removed and replaced with one at the re-opened Pukekohe facility. In July 2025 a single Sunday return service was introduced. All improvements have been funded from operational cost savings.

The report uses data from April 2021 to December 2025 inclusive, noting that there was no service from mid-August 2021 until mid-January 2022 because of the COVID-19 lockdown in Auckland.

Headline Statistics

Until end of December 2025, there have been 278,205 one-way passenger trips on Te Huia. For the first few months – when Te Huia weekday services only ran as far as Papakura – travel demand was slow to take off. From April 2022, once passenger numbers had recovered after the COVID-19 service suspension and weekday trains were running through The Strand, trip numbers steadily increased up until end of 2024. The months between March and September 2024 – after introduction of more frequent services on Thursday, Friday and Saturday represent the high point of passenger numbers. The impact of the blocks of line in 2025 resulted in lower weekday passenger trip numbers (down 16% on 2024), although weekend demand has remained the same.

Key headlines for passenger demand include:

- Just over half all of one-way passenger trip tickets were sold to adults, and a further quarter to SuperGold card holders. The remaining 21% of passenger trips were distributed amongst a variety of ticket types.
- The highest individual journey purpose category is travel to work – just under one third of passengers.
- Around 80% of passengers state they use Te Huia for a variety of non-work purposes.
- Around a third of passengers travel at least once a week, and another quarter at least once a month.
- Journeys between Hamilton (both Frankton and Rotokauri) and Auckland make up three quarters of travel on Te Huia. This means that the average passenger trip distance is high at just under 114 kilometres.
- Overall level of customer satisfaction is very high – at 98% in 2025.

Performance Against Targets

The following table provides a summary of the extent to which Te Huia targets have been achieved.

Te Huia Performance Against Targets

KPI	Description	Performance: T = Target and A = Actual									
		2021*		2022		2023		2024		2025	
		T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
1a	Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	167	137	190	209	250	261	250	307	250	263
1b	Average Saturday demand (passengers per day)	42	295	75	238	100	210	250	281	250	283
1c	Amended target: Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	-	-	-	-	400	261	400	307	400	263
2	On-time trips arriving within 5 minutes (%)	90	96.8	90	84.6	90	68.5	90	84.8	90	85.3
3	Farebox Recovery (%)	-	-	7.6	6.0	15.0	13.4	15.0	15.4	15.0	17.9
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5	Delayed trips within 15 minutes of timetable (%)	95	98.0	95	93.4	95	92.8	95	95.5	95	96.3
6	Overall customer satisfaction (%)	-	-	90	94	90	98	90	99	90	98

* Incomplete year four months (April to August 2021)

Colours:

Meets or exceeds target
Within 10% of target
Over 10% below target

Six of the eight targets have met or exceeded the target; one (punctuality) is within 10% of target and only the stretch target for passenger trip numbers has not been met. Given the challenges which have been faced by Te Huia – which the original business case could never have anticipated when making forecasts – this constitutes very good performance.

Te Huia has established itself as an important part of the region's public transport network and also performs an increasingly important function for Auckland too.

Performance Against Investment Objectives

Evidence of progress against the wider investment objectives is an important part of the Te Huia story. These investment objectives are:

- Daily patronage of 250 passengers three years after start-up of a new public transport service.
- X% increase of people living within 5 kilometres of towns with direct access to a new public transport service by 20xx.
- A shorter journey time by public transport between Hamilton and Central Auckland compared to road during peak periods.
- A more reliable journey time by public transport between Hamilton and Central Auckland compared to road during peak periods.
- X value of building consents granted per annum within 5 kilometres of towns with direct access to a new public transport service by 20xx.

On the positive side the 250 passengers per day target has been met. The presence of Te Huia has opened up interregional rail travel to a large potential market – around a third of the region's population being within five kilometres of a station at either Frankton, Rotokauri or Huntly.

Slow journey times relative to the car continue to be a source of concern, but the reasons are primarily related to infrastructure capacity and performance challenges that are beyond Te Huia's control. The success of Auckland Metro passenger services and the strong presence of freight means that the limited line capacity – two or three tracks between Pukekohe and Waitemata – do not enable faster interregional trains to pass slower ones.

Set against this is the fact that as a timetabled service, Te Huia can provide a more reliable peak period journey time than the car alternative which is subject to the vagaries of traffic congestion north of the Bombay Hills.

In terms of wider economic impacts, the 2018 Single Stage Business Case was somewhat ambitious to propose that a five-year (and relatively infrequent) trial rail service would have a discernible impact on indicators such as building consents. There is no clear evidence of any impact one way or another.

Operational Performance

Te Huia revenues in 2024-25 rose to $1,245,590 and have climbed steadily from previous years as a result of both passenger numbers increasing and higher fares (raised by 20% in 2024 and 10% in 2025).

Annual operating costs have varied in response to both service disruptions (when Te Huia has not run) and changes to levels of service (additional services on some days of the week). The increase in gross cost per operating day in 2023-24 (to $8,017,493) reflects the higher number of services from February 2024 onwards (funded by the Te Huia reserve, with no impact on rates). The reduction in gross costs for 2024-25 (to $6,971,266) reflects the blocks of line where services were not operated as originally intended.

There has been a more than doubling of revenue per service journey since 2021-22 and a consequent reduction in net cost per service journey to $4,756 in 2024-25. Subsidy per passenger trip for this same financial year was $78. At 114 kilometres, Te Huia has a much higher average journey length than (for example) Auckland Metro train services. Subsidy per passenger kilometre – a more accurate assessment of subsidy – was $0.68 in 2024-25 and compares favourably to that of shorter distance train and bus services.

The two-year review of Te Huia – produced in early 2024 – noted very challenging conditions for train punctuality in 2023 because of Auckland rail network engineering works. Matters have improved since then, but punctuality is still below the target of 90%.

Te Huia has generally performed well against key operational performance categories including health & safety, environment and asset reliability:

- Statistically rail is a safer mode of travel than a private motor vehicle as the operating environment is more heavily regulated.
- Better environmental performance is dependent on at least 55 passengers travelling per train (on average) to offset the same level of emissions from equivalent car journeys. The year 2023-24 was the highest with an average of just over 67 passengers per train journey.
- For carriages which date back to the 1970s, and hauled by early 1980s diesel locomotives, reliability (measured by mean distance between failures) is generally very good and contributes to meeting the target of 99% for services delivered.

Conclusions

A key aim of the trial service was to establish proof of concept and demonstrate that trains could provide people with additional travel choice between Hamilton and Auckland.

Te Huia is a much changed service from the two peak return trips every weekday from Hamilton to Papakura which commenced in April 2021. Direct city to city services – without the need for transfer – have undoubtedly made Te Huia more attractive. Council, KiwiRail and NZTA have worked closely to improve the timetable so that – for the same total level of investment – passengers have a significantly greater travel choice compared to the original service. Whilst Te Huia was originally conceived as a commuter train, and still serves this market well, the passenger base is a lot broader and encompasses increasingly important leisure travel market.

There is little doubt that Te Huia has faced many challenges – from COVID-19 through to significant and ongoing disruption on the Auckland Metro rail network. These challenges have meant that building sustained momentum and hence higher levels of passenger demand has sometimes been a struggle. Fundamentally, reliable and punctual rail services have to be consistently available when people need them, and not just when it is operationally convenient or even physically possible.

So given all of the challenges, it is remarkable that Te Huia has demonstrated positive progress. Meeting six of the eight targets – including the original business case passenger trip number forecasts - has been no mean feat. Punctuality and the passenger trip number stretch targets – the two that haven't been met – have been subject to rail network infrastructure performance challenges beyond Te Huia's control. The Auckland Metro services have suffered similar levels of passenger trip number decline.

The overall conclusion of this review and evaluation is that Te Huia has performed sufficiently well to be funded as a permanent service, with a view to further improvements over time. If there is a positive funding decision from both Council and NZTA, then Te Huia would start on 01 July with the existing timetable.

1 Purpose and Objectives

1.1 Definitions

A project **review** is a formal assessment of a progress, performance and outcomes at a specific point in the life cycle and is used to produce an evaluation.

The UK Treasury Magenta Book[1] defines **evaluation** as:

"…a systematic assessment of the design, implementation and outcomes of an intervention. It involves understanding how an intervention is being, or has been, implemented and what effects it has, for whom and why. It identifies what can be improved and estimates its overall impacts and cost-effectiveness.

Both review and evaluation are therefore considered to be good practice for the purpose of future policy and investment decision making.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this report is to undertake a comprehensive **review and evaluation of the Te Huia Interregional Passenger Rail service**, which has operated on a trial basis since April 2021.

The trial has been funded by both New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) and local government partners following a Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) completed in November 2018 on behalf of Waikato Regional Council (WRC)[2]. The SSBC had been requested by the then Minister of Transport, as work undertaken on the Hamilton to Auckland Corridor Spatial Plan had identified a start-up inter-regional rail service as a key enabler for the envisaged transformation.

1.3 Objectives

To deliver the purpose of the end of trial review and evaluation, the following objectives have been set:

- Review and summarise data that has been collected as part of the Te Huia trial service.
- Outline:
    - Who has been using the service.
    - When, where and how they have been using it.
    - Why they have been using it.
- Evaluate results of the trial compared to the SSBC forecast outcomes.
- Assess wider operational performance and its impact on the trial outcomes.
- Examine wider benefits that Te Huia has delivered or contributed to.
- Investigate the case for continuing and improving Te Huia beyond the end of the trial period.

This report has been prepared for both:

- The NZTA Board for its decision on whether to continue co-funding beyond the end of the trial.
- WRC Councillors for a decision on whether to contribute the necessary local share of funding.

Recommendations in this report are for WRC Councillors, as the NZTA Board makes decisions based on advice from their officials.

[1] Magenta Book
[2] Hamilton to Auckland Start-up Passenger Rail Service, Stantec, November 2018

1.4 Report Structure

This report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: Background to the trial and its service history.
- Chapter 3: Te Huia travel demand and passenger profiles.
- Chapter 4: Performance against targets in the SSBC.
- Chapter 5: Performance against investment objectives.
- Chapter 6: Operational performance and impacts.
- Chapter 7: Conclusions.

2 Trial Background and Service History

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the background and service history of Te Huia – from its inception through to the present day. This information is important context for the review and evaluation because it provides an assessment of what was originally intended and how matters have panned out in reality.

2.2 Waikato Connection

Prior to Te Huia, the previous "Waikato Connection" interregional passenger service between Hamilton and Auckland was a very short-lived trial operated by the then privatised Tranz Rail from 26 June 2000 until 07 October 2001. Aimed at commuters into Auckland, a single weekday return diesel railcar service started in Hamilton and called at Huntly, Pukekohe, Papakura, Middlemore and Newmarket. The service was provided on a commercial basis with no public sector subsidy.

Despite Tranz Rail chairman Bob Wheeler stating in October 2000 that the service was "performing up to expectations", it was withdrawn just a year later with the company concentrating on more profitable freight business and selling what it considered to be non-core passenger train assets. Whilst the infrequent Auckland to Wellington Northern Explorer ultimately remained, it would be almost 20 years before another daily interregional passenger rail service connected Hamilton with the nation's largest city.

It was reported that, at the time of withdrawal, the Waikato Connection was carrying an average of 129 passengers per trip, most of whom boarded at Pukekohe or Papakura, with only about 30 travelling the full distance between Hamilton and Auckland.

2.3 Further Studies of Interregional Passenger Rail

In the intervening years between 2001 and 2018, two studies investigated the case for re-introducing passenger rail services between Hamilton and Auckland.

In August 2005, a *Preliminary Feasibility Study into Passenger Rail Services in the Hamilton Area* included a short section on the Hamilton to Auckland service (the study considered a variety of possible train services around the city). The report, commissioned by Hamilton City Council and Environment Waikato, was vague about what a Hamilton to Auckland service could look like, how much it would cost and potential benefits of its introduction. The main issues discussed were around feasibility of gaining access to the Auckland rail network, track access charges and obtaining second hand diesel rolling stock. Interestingly, the current Te Huia SA carriages were identified as an option – they were then around 30 years old. One conclusion reached by the report was that future services, whilst feasible, were unlikely to be commercial and would therefore require subsidy.

Four years later in May 2009 a "Preliminary Business Case" produced on behalf of Environment Waikato went into more detail on a Hamilton to Auckland service operating concept. Proposals and forecasts in this document were:

- Operate a single return service, departing Hamilton around 6.00am to 6.30 am, arriving in Auckland two hours later, and returning from Auckland about 5:30 pm.
- Station calls at Hamilton (Frankton), Huntly, Papatoetoe, Newmarket and Britomart.
- Use of Silver Fern railcars on lease from KiwiRail.
- Indicative operating cost of $1.84 million per year.
- Demand estimated at 144 single journeys per day (128 from Frankton and 16 from Huntly) giving a train load factor of 75%.
- Average fare of $24 from Hamilton to Auckland, and $17.60 from Huntly (both including GST).

- Annual fare revenue of $840,000 (including GST) which would cover 40% of operating costs in the first year, increasing to 68% by 2023.
- Benefit to Cost Ratio (BCR) of 1.9 (over 15 years).
- 60% funding to come from NZTA.

The report concluded that there was a solid business case for proceeding with a service and could be established as early as July – very quick given the report was produced in May. However, at the time there was insufficient political direction to make anything happen.

2.4 Hamilton to Auckland Interregional Passenger Rail

2.4.1 Background to the Single Stage Business Case

Fast forward to 2017 and the Labour Party election manifesto included a proposal to reintroduce interregional passenger rail services between Hamilton and Auckland. The subsequent 2018 Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS) supported investment in new interregional commuter rail services, including the capital costs associated with the rolling stock to support housing and employment opportunities. The Labour-New Zealand First government coalition agreement included significant investment in regional rail in the May 2019 budget.

This is the context within which the Hamilton to Auckland Interregional Passenger Rail Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) was produced by Stantec (on behalf of Waikato Regional Council) in November 2018. The SSBC noted that the Hamilton City, Waikato and Waipa Districts were experiencing very high population growth, particularly in Auckland and Hamilton but also the urban settlements along the interceding corridor between the two cities. Population growth, and economic transformation being planned for the corridor, was also putting increased pressure on the existing transport connections and highlighting opportunities to establish areas of "transit-oriented development" with the re-establishment of an inter-regional rail service.

As a result, the SSBC highlighted that in February 2018 the Minister for Transport requested that the business case for the proposed Hamilton to Auckland Passenger Rail Service be completed as a priority, and work accelerated on the Hamilton to Auckland Corridor Spatial Plan.

In addition, the SSBC noted a longer-term plan for transport connections through progression of an express service in the medium term, a rapid rail connection to Auckland in the longer-term, plus the eventual extension through to Tauranga. Given the Minister's stated priority, the SSBC was completed ahead of the Hamilton to Auckland Corridor Spatial Plan and long-term transport vision. However, early spatial planning work had already confirmed key stakeholder expectations, which were that a start-up service would be a key part and enabler of the longer-term vision for the corridor and interconnecting transport services.

In November 2020, the Hamilton-Auckland Corridor Plan & Implementation Programme identified the start-up passenger rail service as a key initiative. By then, Te Huia was less than six months from commencement having been funded in August 2019.

2.4.2 Conclusions of the Single Stage Business Case

The SSBC examined a range of options and proposed a trial service for a minimum five-year period between Frankton (Hamilton) and Auckland (Papakura), with intermediate stations at The Base (Hamilton)[3] and Huntly. The trip duration between Frankton and Auckland city centre (allowing for transfer to an Auckland Metro service at Papakura) was expected to be around two and a half hours.

The proposed service pattern was two trains per weekday in each peak direction and a single return on Saturday. The services would depart Hamilton early in the morning and return in the evening – times designed around the daily commute for work. The service would commence with two train consists of four-carriages, providing an overall capacity of around 300 passengers per day each way.

[3] Subsequently named Rotokauri.

The SSBC envisaged a Sunday and public holiday service brought online as demand grew and track access permitted, but unlikely to start until year four or five of the trial. The SSBC proposed an incremental approach – building up the service year by year, providing a clear implementation pathway that responds to customer requirements over time, within cost and infrastructure constraints.

Beyond the initial start-up period, and depending upon demand, the SSBC envisaged that service would call at the new Puhinui station interchange (with connections to Auckland Airport) and Auckland city centre (subject to available capacity on the Metro network). Any service enhancement would be subject to further assessment before confirmation and implementation if deemed feasible. The SSBC stated that all service options involving further penetration into the Auckland Metro Network would be subject to the completion of the key rail projects. As it turned out, Te Huia was able to deliver greater penetration into Auckland much sooner than was envisaged – starting in January 2022.

The SSBC estimated the capital cost of the start-up service at $49.46 million (including contingencies), 52% of which was locomotive and rolling stock-related, and 48% station infrastructure. Annual operating costs were estimated at $7.74 million once the service was fully implemented (post 2023). The SSBC forecast that operating costs would be offset by fare revenue of $1.56 million - once the service was fully implemented, and this would grow with patronage and any future service enhancements. The benefit to cost ratio (BCR) was calculated to be 0.5 at the standard 6% discount rate, based on Present Value net benefits of $62.4m and Present Value net costs of $118.8m over a 30-year evaluation period rather than just the five year trial.

The SSBC proposed a scheduled date for service commencement of March 2020. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual start date was delayed by just over a year until April 2021.

More content from the SSBC will be discussed in subsequent chapters, especially the investment objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets.

2.4.3 Endorsement of the SSBC and Funding Approval

The SSBC was endorsed, and in-principle funding approved, by the NZTA Board in December 2018, noting that a start-up was a first step to a potential faster service in the future. Figure 1 sets out the December 2018 NZTA Board resolution.

Funding approval for rolling stock purchase and pre-implementation work did not include precise costs, and their sign off was delegated to the then NZTA Chief Executive. The condition subsequent in paragraph a) made it clear that there was still significant work to be done, to be signed off by independent stage gate reviews.

Further technical assessments in the first half of 2019 - including a review by consultants SNC Lavalin - concluded that the SSBC costs were an under-estimate. This resulted in a second NZTA Board approval in August 2019 which this time was based on specific figures, as shown in Figure 2 below. The funding arrangement was based on a bespoke Funding Assistance Rate (FAR) of 75.5%, which was higher than the standard 51%.

A condition of approval was that WRC must undertake a review after two years of the service. Significantly the Board also noted that the outcomes of the trial must be measured and reported on. This end of trial review and evaluation report effectively meets the NZTA Board requirement.

Figure 1: NZTA Board Resolution, December 2018

Resolution 19	*The NZ Transport Agency Board:* a) ***Endorses*** *the Hamilton to Auckland Passenger Rail start up service Single Stage Business Case, subject to a condition subsequent that independent Stage Gate Reviews are undertaken during Pre-implementation to consider and approve: revised and updated costs (capital and operating), improved demand forecasts, robust Customer Service & Marketing Plan, updated Project Delivery & Assurance Plans, and full operational safety sign off.* b) ***Approves*** *funding to Waikato Regional Council (fully funded Transitional Rail activity class) for purchase of rolling stock; subject to a condition precedent where the costs are agreed and signed off by the NZ Transport Agency Chief Executive.* c) ***Approves*** *funding to Waikato Regional Council (fully funded Transitional Rail activity class) for Pre-implementation work associated with refurbishment of the rolling stock, subject to:* i. *a condition precedent where the NZ Transport Agency Chief Executive reviews and approves the proposed level of funding; and* ii. *a condition subsequent of the right of the Transport Agency to re-use the asset should the start up service not proceed, or be withdrawn during or at the end of the five year period.*

Source: NZTA Board Meeting Minutes, December 2018

Figure 2: NZTA Board Resolution, August 2019

Resolution	*The NZ Transport Agency Board, in respect of the Hamilton to Auckland Passenger Rail Start-up Service:* a) ***Noted*** *an increase in total cost from $78.249 million, identified in the Single Stage Business Case (escalated to $79.21 million), to $92.372 million.* b) ***Approved*** *bespoke enhanced funding assistance rates (of 75.5% for Waikato Regional Council, 75.5% for Hamilton City Council and 76% for Waikato District Council) for the remaining phases of project (not already approved at TEFAR) extended to the end of the five-year trial period (with an additional financial impact of $10.54 million).* c) ***Approved*** *an increase in implementation funding of $13.165 million, comprising $8.212 million identified within the SNC Lavalin review (including KiwiRail margin) and approximately $5 million net additional cost to construct a footbridge at Rotokauri Station, taking the total implementation cost to $62.2 million (National Land Transport Fund share: $54 million), with the following conditions subsequent that:* i. *an independent peer review be undertaken of the operations plan and budgets for the service to identify potential efficiency improvements and cost savings and is approved by the NZ Transport Agency Chief Executive prior to service launch; and* ii. *Waikato Regional Council undertake a full review of the service within two years of launch, including patronage, revenue and funding, and for this to identify opportunities for further development or enhancement, to be reported to the Transport Agency Board;* iii. *this is a trial to gauge market demand and support, and outcomes must be measured and reported on.*

Source: NZTA Board Meeting Minutes, August 2019

2.4.4 Pre-implementation Programme

Following NZTA Board endorsement of the SSBC and funding approval, WRC led an intense pre-implementation programme of work to prepare for the service to commence in early 2020. Key partners were KiwiRail, Hamilton City Council (HCC) and Waikato District Council (WDC).

The key tasks in this programme included:

- Purchase and refurbishment of 12 ex-Auckland Transport carriages.
- Adaptation of existing freight locomotives for passenger service.
- Construction of stations at Huntly and Rotokauri.
- Expansion of Te Rapa depot to accommodate the trains.
- Conclusion of a Rail Services Agreement (RSA) to operate the trains.

- Development of a comprehensive operational plan covering:
  - Communications and passenger information.
  - Integration with Auckland Transport services at Papakura.
  - Service mobilisation.
  - Train control systems.
  - Emergency / safety procedures.
  - Carriage maintenance.
  - Real time information.
  - Wifi.
  - Ticketing.
  - Café bar.
  - Cleaning and train care.
  - On-board passenger information.
  - Emergency response.
  - Bus replacement services.
  - Accessibility for people with disabilities.
  - Benefits realisation.
  - Station management.
  - Wayfinding and signage.
  - Bus / rail integration.
  - Contract and financial management.

The timescale to deliver the service by March 2020 was tight but potentially achievable. However, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant delays in physical construction and train refurbishment activities. Furthermore, various lockdowns and messaging around risk of contracting COVID-19 when using public transport meant that the operating environment was not conducive to starting a new service. All this meant that the start of Te Huia was put back by a year to 06 April 2021.

2.4.5 Passenger Facilities

Te Huia is an interregional passenger rail service, with journey distances and times which are much longer than those for metro services in Auckland and most of Wellington[4]. As such Te Huia provides facilities which enable passengers to experience a higher level of service, most notably:

- On-board staff.
- Comfortable seats.
- Toilets.
- Tables.
- Café.
- Wifi.

[4] Although a commuter service the Wairarapa line has long journey times – around one hour 45 minutes from Masterton to Wellington.

- Access for disabled people.

Te Huia provides a working environment conducive to high levels of personal productivity. People can work on the train in a way that is not possible when driving a car. One Te Huia passenger summed it up as follows:

> *"Te Huia has been an absolute game-changer for my commute to Auckland for work. It has taken what was previously an incredibly inconsistent and energy-sapping drive and turned it into an additional 4 hours of productive time that I can use in my mornings and evenings."*
>
> Source: Translens EQ24012803

Te Huia provides a wheelchair hoist and space for people with disabilities, which is something that the Inter City coach service does not offer. The service has therefore significantly enhanced accessibility for some of the most disadvantaged members of society.

2.4.6 Two Year Review

Whilst the full service history is dealt with in the next section, completion of the trial was contingent on NZTA agreeing to co-fund the final two years from the 2024-27 National Land Transport Programme (NLTP). This was a condition of funding approval in the August 2019 NZTA Board decision. Given that the trial was suspended for five months in the latter half of 2021 and early 2022, the two year review was subsequently rescheduled for the start of 2024.

Therefore, in January 2024, WRC prepared the Te Huia Interim Performance Assessment (THIPA) which concluded that, despite significant Auckland network performance issues, the service was performing well and making good progress towards meeting most targets. The THIPA was reported to the 03 May 2024 Future Proof Public Transport Subcommittee[5].

At its May 2024 Board meeting, based on the conclusions of the THIPA and NZTA agreed to provide funding to enable the trial to continue until 30 June 2026.

2.5 Te Huia Service History

2.5.1 Original Timetable

The first Te Huia train rolled out of Frankton station before 6am on Tuesday 06 April 2021. There was significant national publicity, including a feature on TV NZ fronted by well-known journalist John Campbell. A total of 269 fare-paying passengers travelled on this first day of service.

As shown in Table 1, Te Huia commenced with two weekday early morning departures from Hamilton to Papakura, and two early evening return journeys in the opposite direction. Trains were stabled at Westfield depot during the day and crews travelled back to Hamilton by road as there was no immediate return service in the opposite direction.

The single Saturday service was a slightly later morning departure, with a return late afternoon. Unlike the weekday service, the train ran all the way into central Auckland and terminated at The Strand station on the edge of Auckland city centre. In terms of passenger numbers, the Saturday service proved to be especially popular.

Table 1: Te Huia Timetable at Service Commencement (06 April 2021)

Service Day	Hamilton to Auckland	Auckland to Hamilton
Monday to Friday*	**Service 1** Hamilton (Frankton): 5.46am Rotokauri: 5.54am Huntly: 6.16am	**Service 1** Papakura: 4.42pm Huntly: 5.42pm Rotokauri: 6.12pm

[5] Future Proof Public Transport Subcommittee Agenda Package - Core Share

Service Day	Hamilton to Auckland	Auckland to Hamilton
	Papakura: 7.25am	Hamilton (Frankton): 6.21pm
	Service 2	**Service 2**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 6.28am	Papakura: 6.25pm
	Rotokauri: 6.36am	Huntly: 7.25pm
	Huntly: 7.25am	Rotokauri: 7.55pm
	Papakura: 8.07am	Hamilton (Frankton): 8.04pm
Saturday	**Service 1**	**Service 1**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 7.41am	Auckland (The Strand): 5.40pm
	Rotokauri: 7.49am	Papakura: 6.35pm
	Huntly: 8.11am	Huntly: 7.35pm
	Papakura: 9.20am	Rotokauri: 8.05pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 10.10am	Hamilton (Frankton): 8.14pm

** Weekday arrival into Auckland (Britomart) approximately one hour after Papakura. Weekday departure from Auckland (Britomart) approximately one hour before Papakura.*

Source: Original Te Huia Timetable, WRC web site April 2021

2.5.2 Timetable and Service Improvements

After only four months of operation, further COVID-19 travel restrictions resulted in Te Huia services being suspended between August 2021 and January 2022. The re-launch in early 2022 commenced with an extension of Te Huia from Papakura to the Strand in central Auckland (a response to customer feedback), thereby delivering a direct centre to centre connection with no transfer. This improvement, which the SSBC had previously ruled out on feasibility grounds, resulted in a significant uptake in patronage once the initial recovery period from COVID-19 had passed.

In response to passenger demand, further improvements have since been made to the original service offering – as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Te Huia Service Improvements Since April 2021

Date	Summary of Improvement
January 2022	• Extension from Papakura to Central Auckland (The Strand) on weekdays. • Additional station call at Puhinui to connect with frequent Auckland airport bus services. • Amendments to weekday timetable: afternoon departure from Waikato to Auckland, and morning departure from Auckland to Waikato.
December 2023	• Refurbishment of historic station building at The Strand, for travellers to wait prior to their journey. • Facilities include café and wifi.
February 2024	• Introduction of a third return service on Thursdays and Fridays • Introduction of a second return service on Saturday.
February 2025	• Replacement of the Papakura station call with Pukekohe • Reduction in journey times on most services of between five and ten minutes.
July 2025	• Introduction of a single Sunday afternoon return service. • Enables weekend travel between Hamilton and Auckland.

As a result of these improvements, the current (January 2026) Te Huia timetable is shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Te Huia Timetable (February 2026)

Service Day	Hamilton to Auckland	Auckland to Hamilton
Monday to Friday	**Service 1**	**Service 1**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 6.05am	Auckland (The Strand): 9.45am
	Rotokauri: 6.15am	Puhinui: 10.15am
	Huntly: 6.39am	Pukekohe: 10.26am
	Pukekohe: 7.27am	Huntly: 11.37am
	Puhinui: 8.03am	Rotokauri: 12.07pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 8.30am	Hamilton (Frankton): 12.15pm
	Service 2	**Service 2**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 2.05pm	Auckland (The Strand): 5.45pm
	Rotokauri: 2.15pm	Puhinui: 6.20pm
	Huntly: 2.37pm	Pukekohe: 6.57pm
	Pukekohe: 3.26pm	Huntly: 7.41pm
	Puhinui: 4.03pm	Rotokauri: 8.11pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 4.34pm	Hamilton (Frankton): 8.19pm
	Service 3 (Thursday and Friday)	**Service 3 (Thursday and Friday)**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 9.30am	Auckland (The Strand): 3.25pm
	Rotokauri: 9.40am	Puhinui: 3.59pm
	Huntly: 10.02am	Pukekohe: 4.29pm
	Pukekohe: 10.50am	Huntly: 5.13pm
	Puhinui: 11.26am	Rotokauri: 5.42pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 11.54am	Hamilton (Frankton): 5.50pm
Saturday	**Service 1**	**Service 1**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 7.35am	Auckland (The Strand): 3.05pm
	Rotokauri: 7.45am	Puhinui: 3.38pm
	Huntly: 8.07am	Pukekohe: 4.07pm
	Pukekohe: 8.59am	Huntly: 4.59pm
	Puhinui: 9.34am	Rotokauri: 5.28pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 10.03am	Hamilton (Frankton): 5.36pm
	Service 2	**Service 2**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 9.00am	Auckland (The Strand): 5.30pm
	Rotokauri: 9.10am	Puhinui: 5.57pm
	Huntly: 9.32am	Pukekohe: 6.27pm
	Pukekohe: 10.27am	Huntly: 7.13pm
	Puhinui: 11.01am	Rotokauri: 7.44pm
	Auckland (The Strand): 11.29am	Hamilton (Frankton): 7.52pm
Sunday	**Service 1**	**Service 1**
	Hamilton (Frankton): 2.45pm	Auckland (The Strand): 6.15pm
	Rotokauri: 2.54pm	Puhinui: 6.42pm
	Huntly: 3.18pm	Pukekohe: 7.12pm
	Pukekohe: 4.06pm	Huntly: 7.58pm
	Puhinui: 4.43pm	Rotokauri: 8.29pm

Service Day	Hamilton to Auckland	Auckland to Hamilton
	Auckland (The Strand): 5.17pm	Hamilton (Frankton): 8.37pm

Source: Te Huia Timetable, WRC

Te Huia has not run continuously since April 2021 because of several disruptions throughout its history.

The most significant of these was a five month service suspension as a result of the Auckland COVID-19 lockdown. The last service day was 17 August 2021, and trains did not start running again until 24 January 2022. In effect, the service suspension meant that Te Huia had to start from scratch and it took until mid-April 2022 (a year after original commencement) for passenger numbers to increase to what might have been expected.

Another service suspension took place for three weeks from mid-July to early August 2023, this time because of two signal passed at danger (SPAD) incidents involving Te Huia trains on the Auckland Metro network. NZTA, as the rail regulator, prohibited Te Huia from travelling north of Papakura until investigations and remedial action could be put in place. When the full service was reinstated on 07 August, WRC offered free travel for that first week. Passenger numbers were at record levels – 3,869 trips over the six days until 12 August.

In 2023 as a whole temporary speed restrictions (TSRs), resulting from the Auckland Rail Network Rebuild and Papakura to Pukekohe electrification, had a severe impact on service punctuality. The two-year review report catalogued the delays in detail – 369 incidents in total. Between August and December of 2023 on-time performance did not exceed 60% (having been nearer to 90% for most of 2022).

The year 2025 saw a new challenge. A change to the method of undertaking pre-City Rail Link (CRL) engineering works by KiwiRail resulted in regular repeated blocks of line (BOLs); amounting to 65 days when Te Huia could not run a scheduled service. More details are outlined in chapter 4.

There are periods when Te Huia has never been scheduled to run – most notably over the Christmas and New Year holidays. Table 4 summarises the dates within this period when no Te Huia services have operated.

Table 4: Periods When Te Huia Does Not Operate

Years	Closure Dates
Late 2023 / early 2024	24 December to 15 January
Late 2024 / early 2025	24 December to 27 January
Late 2025 / early 2026	25 December to 18 January

Source: WRC web site

Summer holidays would almost certainly be a significant period of demand for Te Huia, as there is a combination of leisure and commuter based travel. Repeated closure every year has therefore resulted in around 11 weeks' worth of lost passengers and revenue over Te Huia's service life so far.

When Te Huia patronage targets were set by the SSBC, the level of service disruption outlined above could not have possibly been anticipated. Furthermore, public transport needs to be consistently available when people need it, and continuous disruptions experienced by Te Huia has made it very challenging to give people confidence in the service. It is all the more remarkable that Te Huia continues to demonstrate a very high level of passenger satisfaction, and that around a third of passengers use the train at least once a week.

2.6 Conclusions

Until Te Huia there had been a long and not altogether successful history of delivering a passenger rail service between Hamilton and Auckland. The short-lived Waikato Connection became the victim

of wider commercial imperatives for the rail operator at the time. Various studies and business cases prior to 2018 failed to convince decision makers to invest in a service. However, Te Huia has now been operating since April 2021 and uninterrupted since January 2022 (a period of four years).

Te Huia is a service which has demonstrated significant leadership and resilience amongst all of the organisations who have been part of its journey. Not since introduction of the Capital Connection (Palmerston North to Wellington) service has another interregional train been delivered. The investment of over $90 million has established a service which is hugely popular with passengers and performs well against many of its targets – as detailed in chapter 4. From SSBC approval to commencement of the service took two and a half years, which is impressive given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the service commenced, Te Huia has faced a range of challenges which have impacted on operational performance and passenger numbers; and were not anticipated by the 2018 SSBC. Nevertheless, thanks to significant commitment from NZTA, KiwiRail and the Councils, Te Huia has established itself as an important part of the Waikato public transport network and, in terms of longevity, has been more successful than the previous Waikato Connection train.

3 Travel Demand and Passenger Profiles

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive picture of:

- How many people use Te Huia.
- Who uses it.
- When they use it.
- Where they use it.
- Why they use it.

WRC has a comprehensive Power BI database and dashboard which contains a trove of information collected from the ticketing system, financial records and passenger surveys. Analysis in this chapter comes from this dashboard and covers the period between 06 April 2021 and 24 December 2025 (inclusive). Allowing for service suspension due to COVID-19 (August 2021 to January 2022), the annual Christmas / new year shutdown and other blocks of line, the total scheduled operational period is just under four years.

3.2 Passenger Trip Numbers

The Te Huia web site shows passenger trip numbers for every service day[6], which also includes instances where buses have replaced trains due to unplanned disruption.

Between April 2021 and December 2025 there have been **278,205 one-way passenger trips on Te Huia**. Figure 3 below shows the number of passenger trips for each calendar month.

The relatively slow start in 2021 – when Te Huia weekday services only ran as far as Papakura – is notable. Only in July of that year did total numbers rise above 4,000 per month for the first time. The Saturday service – which did go The Strand on the edge of central Auckland - was the most popular train at this time. From April 2022, once passenger numbers had recovered after the COVID-19 service suspension and weekday trains were running through The Strand, trip numbers steadily increased up until end of 2024. The months between March and September 2024 – after introduction of more frequent services on Thursday, Friday and Saturday represent the high point of passenger numbers. The impact of the blocks of line in 2025 can be seen in the lower passenger trip numbers (16% down on 2024). Nevertheless, passenger numbers were relatively healthy in November and December 2025 compared to previous years – which points to a possible recovery.

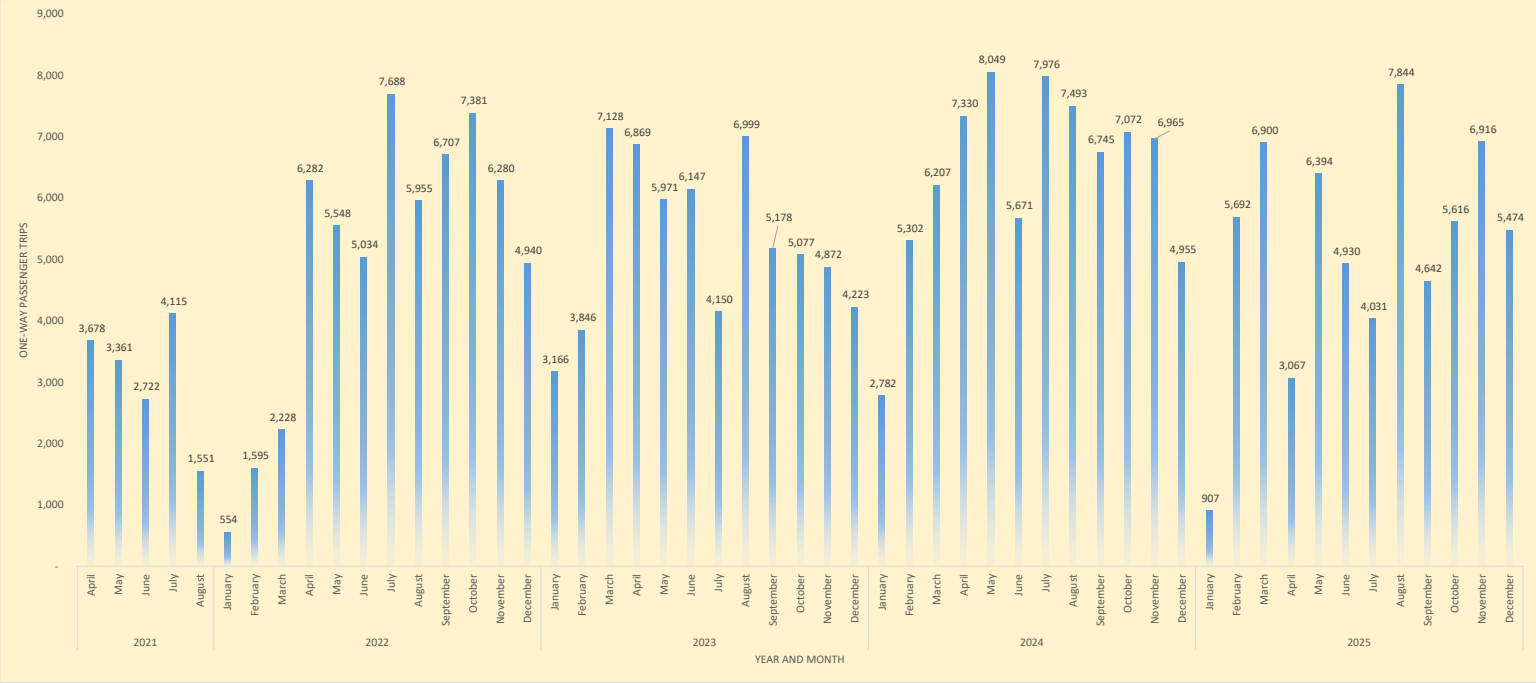
Passenger demand is not spread equally across the year. There is some variation in numbers of passenger trips in each month as shown in Figure 4 below. For the total number of trips, the months of April to August are based on five years of data as they include 2021. Because of Te Huia starting in April 2021, and the COVID-19 pandemic service suspension, other months (January, February, March, September, October, November and December) are based on only four years.

The four months with the highest total trip numbers are (in descending order) August, May, July and April – all of which are based on five years of data. The highest month based on only four years of data is October. The impact of the new year shutdown can be seen in the figures for January, which are very low at a time when demand for Te Huia would be high[7]. The two other months where trip numbers are significantly lower are February and December – the also latter impacted by the holiday shutdown.

[6] Te Huia Patronage Data

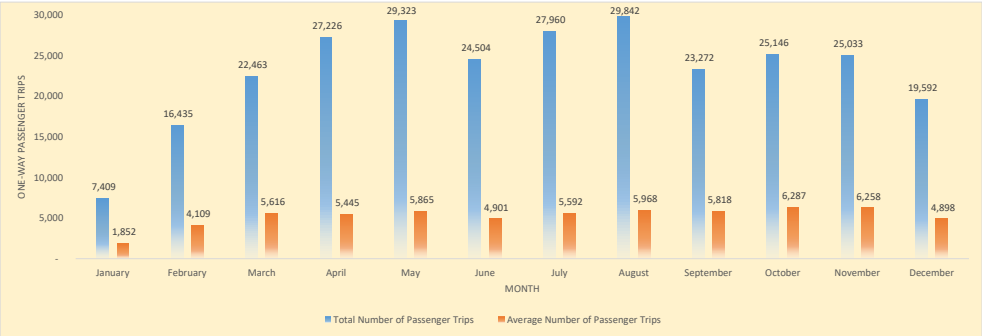
[7] In contrast roadworks on the State Highway network are often suspended for the holiday period – an example of inconsistent treatment for rail passengers.

Figure 3: Te Huia Monthly Passenger Trip Numbers (2021 to 2025)



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

Figure 4: Te Huia Monthly Total and Average Passenger Trip Numbers (2021 to 2025)



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

Average passenger trip numbers account for the different number of years, and show that the highest months are October, November, August and May. Again, January is by far and away the lowest month for passenger trip numbers.

3.3 Passenger Types

3.3.1 Introduction

There are two ways of categorising Te Huia passengers:

- By type of ticket they purchase.
- By socio-demographic information provided in surveys.

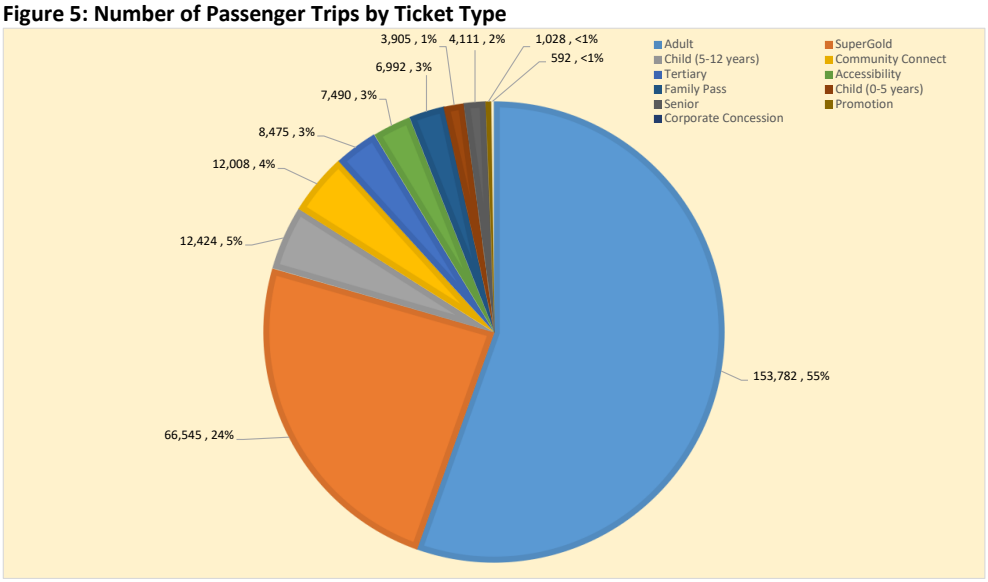
3.3.2 Ticket Type

Figure 5 provides a breakdown of passenger trip numbers for all ticket types which have been available within Te Huia's service history.

Just over half all of one-way passenger trip tickets were sold to adults, and a further quarter to SuperGold card holders. The remaining 21% of passenger trips were distributed amongst a variety of ticket types – the most significant being children aged 5 to 12 years, the Community Connect concession, tertiary students, accessibility concession and the (now withdrawn) family pass.

The strong representation of adults and children (5-12 years) is important from a revenue perspective as these people are charged full fares - unlike SuperGold users who travel for free outside of peak hour trains and Community Connect who benefit from half price rides at any time.

Figure 5: Number of Passenger Trips by Ticket Type

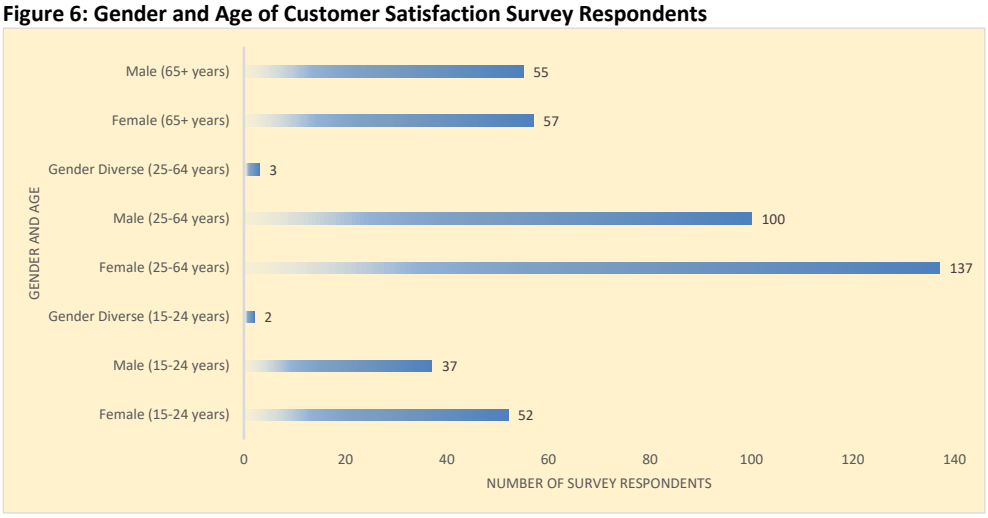


Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

3.3.3 Socio Demographic Information

More detailed socio-demographic information – such as age and gender – is not available from ticket data. Instead, responses provided to the 2025 Te Huia customer satisfaction survey[8] can be analysed. Of the 443 people who provided age and gender information as part of their response, Figure 6 shows the breakdown.

Figure 6: Gender and Age of Customer Satisfaction Survey Respondents



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (2025)

Just over half (53%) were in the adult (25-62 years) category and a quarter over 65 years. The proportion of younger adult users (22%) is encouraging. Children under 15 years do not participate in the survey. The majority of survey respondents (56%) were female and almost all the remainder male (44%).

[8] Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey, 2025

3.3.4 Journey Purpose

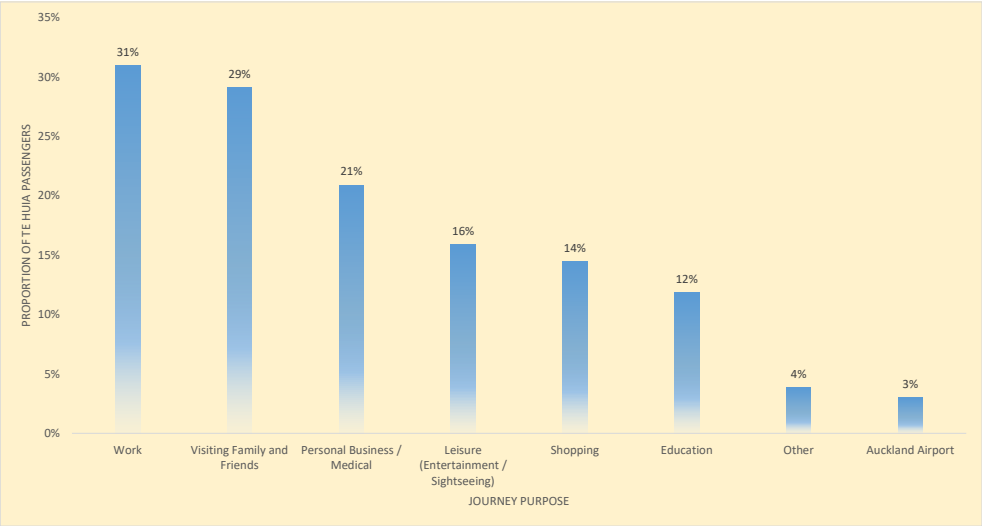
Journey purpose information comes from two sources:

- Te Huia customer satisfaction survey (undertaken every year).
- A 2025 survey of both users and non-users[9].

In both surveys, respondents are able to choose as many journey purposes as possible for which they use Te Huia (not just the main one).

For the annual customer satisfaction survey, based on 498 respondents Figure 7 shows that the highest individual journey purpose category is travel to work – just under one third of passengers. Although travel during the course of work (i.e. for business purposes) is not identified separately, it can be assumed to be contained within the work category. The next four highest journey purposes can all be categorised as non-work / business and collectively 80% of passengers use Te Huia for at least one of these.

Figure 7: Te Huia Passenger Journey Purpose



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (2025)

The 2025 Te Huia survey returns similar results. Based on 4,371 respondents, 84% of people who currently use Te Huia do so for leisure activities. For commuting and travel for business (identified separately) the figures are 15% and 14% respectively. These people are likely to use Te Huia more frequently than leisure travellers, so the proportion of actual passenger trips for these journey purposes will be higher than the journey purpose percentages.

3.4 Time of Use

3.4.1 Introduction

The times when people use Te Huia are an important assessment of demand and reflect the challenge of providing both peak and off-peak services which cater for different journey purposes. There are three main time of use measures:

- Time of trip commencement.
- Travel by day of week.

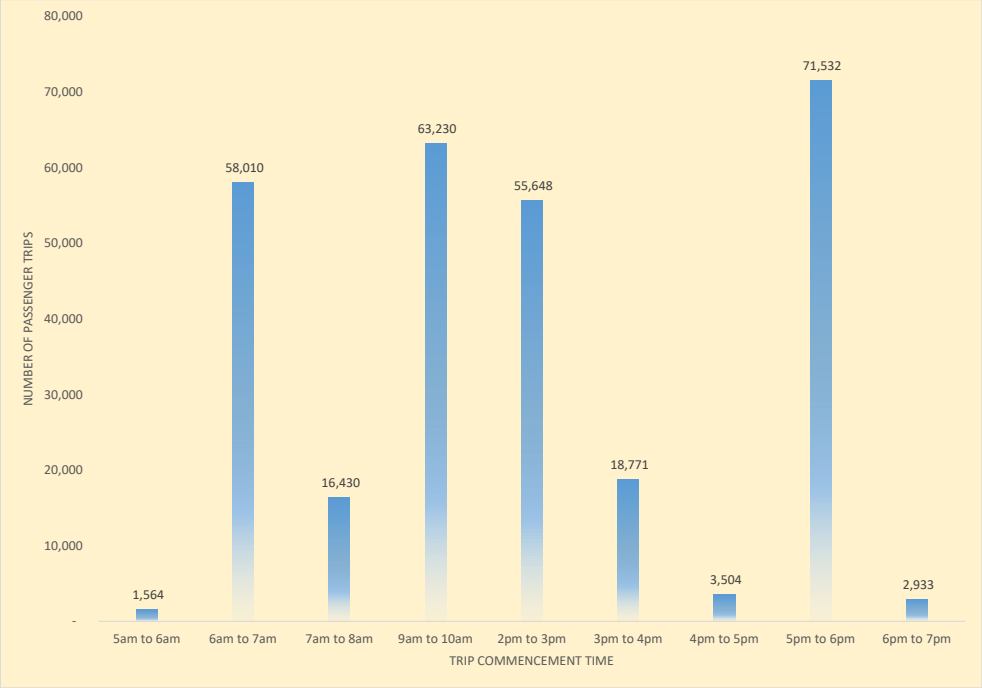
[9] Waikato Regional Council, Te Huia Survey 2025, Versus Research

- Trip frequency.

3.4.2 Time of Trip Commencement

Time of trip commencement is based on the scheduled timetable, which means that passengers have a fixed window within which to travel (unlike car drivers who can choose when to travel). Times of departure also vary between different stations, so are earlier for locations nearer the start of the route. All this means that times people travel are not simply a function of unrestricted demand. If services are less frequent (or even unavailable) at certain times of the day, then fewer (or no) people will travel. Figure 8 shows the number of passenger trips on services that departed within hours of the day where there was a scheduled Te Huia departure. The vast majority of passengers start their journey in four hour periods where a service departs from either Hamilton or Auckland.

Figure 8: Number of Passenger Trips by Time of Commencement (2021-25)



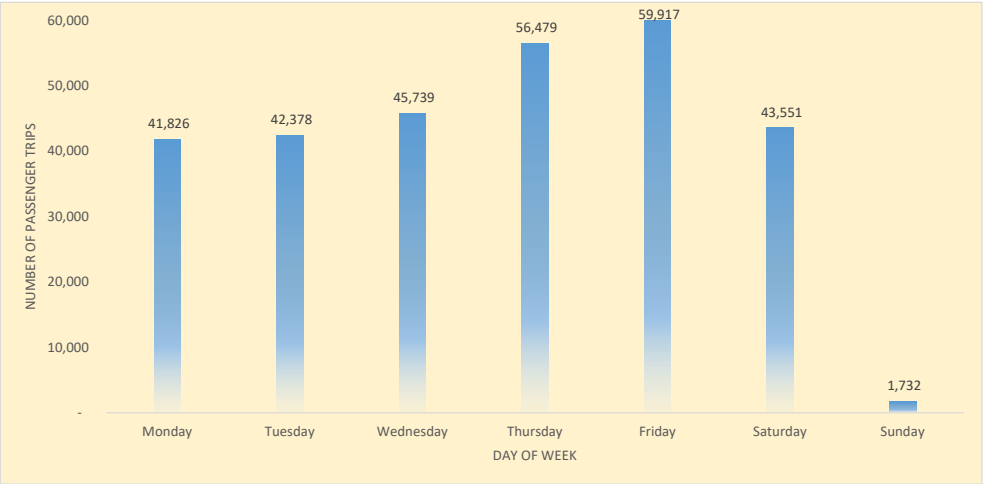
Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

3.4.3 Travel by Day of Week

When Te Huia commenced, weekday services were double those of weekend (two returns versus one return per day). Since February 2024, there are two return services per day Monday to Wednesday and Saturday: with three on Thursday and Friday. Since July 2025 there is one return service per day on Sunday. A seven day a week service gives people greater choice about when they travel, either as a day trip or for a longer period.

Figure 9 shows travel by day of the week. The relatively higher trip numbers on Thursdays and Fridays may be partly a reflection of the higher service frequency since February 2024 but also related to a greater desire for travel on those two days anyway. The figure for Saturday is impressive, given that there was only one train per day prior to February 2024. The very low figure for Sunday is because the service only commenced in July 2025.

Figure 9: Te Huia Travel by Day of the Week (2021-25)



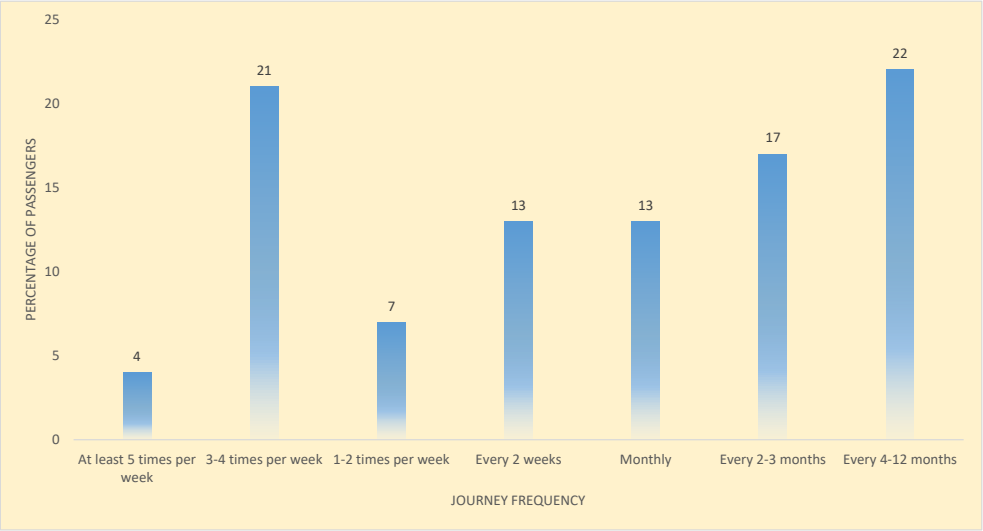
Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

3.4.4 Trip Frequency

Travel by day of the week can also influence trip frequency. Whilst traditional rail services have been planned around five day Monday to Friday commuting, remote working means that daily travel is now often less prevalent than in the past. Longer distance services such as Te Huia are, in any case, not as attractive for daily travel compared with metro trains in Auckland - because many people do not want to commute for between three to five hours every day.

Figure 10 shows trip frequency as reported to the 2025 Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey, which had 498 respondents.

Figure 10: Te Huia Trip Frequency



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (2025)

Around a third of passengers travel at least once a week, and another quarter at least once a month. There may be significant potential to encourage existing users who use the train less frequently to travel more, if future service improvements are implemented.

3.5 Station Usage

3.5.1 Introduction

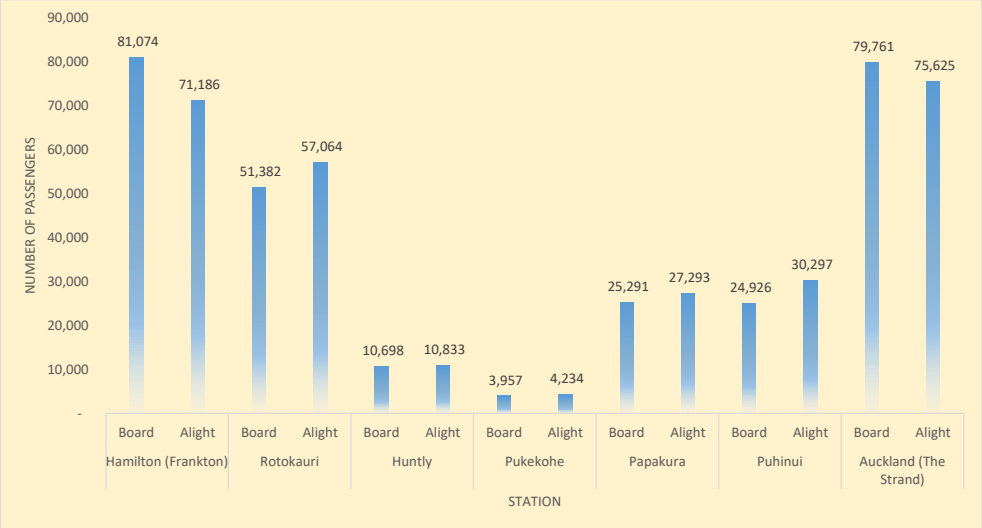
Passenger demand between stations provides details on the trips people want to make, and shows which locations generate and attract the highest usage. There are seven stations that have been served by Te Huia during the trial:

- Hamilton (Frankton).
- Rotokauri.
- Huntly.
- Papakura - until February 2025.
- Pukekohe - after February 2025.
- Puhinui - after January 2022.
- Auckland (The Strand) - after January 2022 on weekdays.

3.5.2 Station Departures

Based on ticket sales data, Figure 11 shows the number of passengers boarding and alighting at each station. Most passengers boarding at the Waikato region stations are travelling towards Auckland and alighting at one of those stations. Similarly, most passengers boarding at Auckland stations are then travelling south and alighting at a Waikato station.

Figure 11: Passengers Boarding and Alighting at Each Station



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

Figure 11 shows that, combining boarding and alighting, passenger demand each station (in descending order): is:

- Auckland (The Strand): 152,207
- Hamilton (Frankton): 149,321
- Rotokauri: 120,150
- Puhinui: 53,598
- Papakura: 52,584

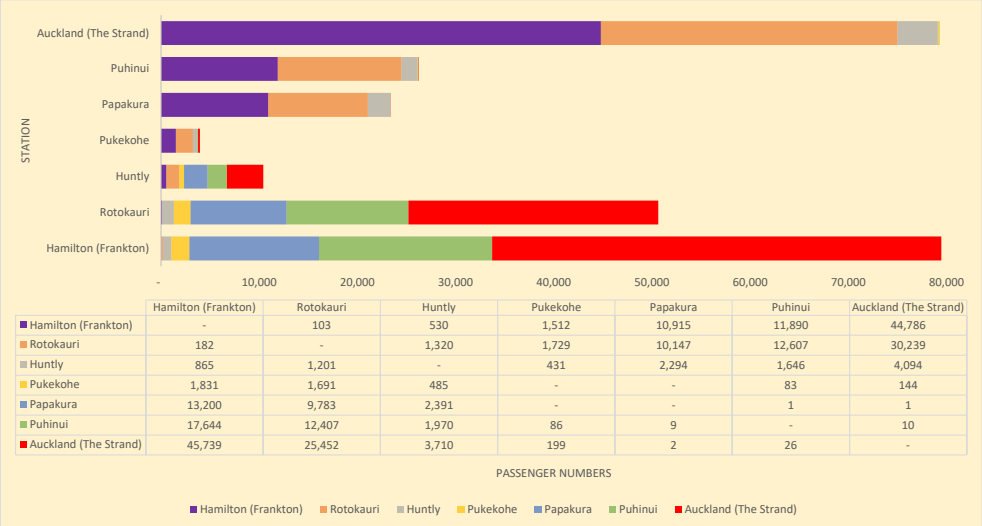
- Huntly: 21,110
- Pukekohe: 7,502

Whilst Auckland (The Strand) is the single busiest station (being the main destination in the morning and origin in the afternoon), the two Hamilton city stations (Frankton and Rotokauri) combined represent half the passenger trip numbers. The figure for Pukekohe is low because it has only been served by Te Huia for less than a year and combining the figure with Papakura provides a better indication of demand to / from south Auckland. Puhinui station has performed relatively well as it is the railhead for Auckland Airport. Huntly perhaps represents the lowest level of passenger demand, which reflects the relative size of the settlement and passenger catchment.

3.5.3 Station to Station Travel

Figure 12 details station to station travel and shows that passenger trips between Hamilton (both Frankton and Rotokauri) and Auckland make up three quarters of travel on Te Huia. The average passenger trip distance is high at just under 114 kilometres.

Figure 12: Station to Station Travel



	Hamilton (Frankton)	Rotokauri	Huntly	Pukekohe	Papakura	Puhinui	Auckland (The Strand)
Hamilton (Frankton)	-	103	530	1,512	10,915	11,890	44,786
Rotokauri	182	-	1,320	1,729	10,147	12,607	30,239
Huntly	865	1,201	-	431	2,294	1,646	4,094
Pukekohe	1,831	1,691	485	-	-	83	144
Papakura	13,200	9,783	2,391	-	-	1	1
Puhinui	17,644	12,407	1,970	86	9	-	10
Auckland (The Strand)	45,739	25,452	3,710	199	2	26	-

Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

With the exception of Pukekohe, travel on Te Huia between stations in the Auckland Metro area has not been allowed, which is in contrast to Capital Connection (Palmerston North to Wellington) which enables travel between Waikanae, Paraparaumu and Wellington station.

3.6 Customer Satisfaction

3.6.1 Introduction

Te Huia exists for its customers. Therefore, the experience that people have when using the service, and attitudes they hold towards it, have a strong bearing on both current and future success. Council therefore conducts an annual survey to ensure there is good knowledge of customer satisfaction, as a means of establishing priorities for improvement.

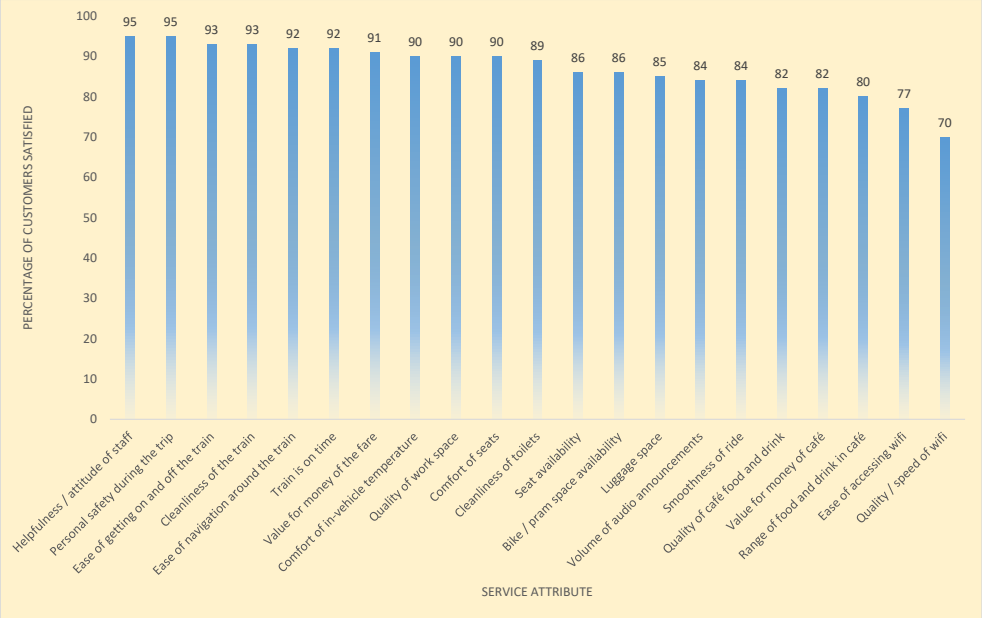
For the latest survey, 498 train user questionnaires between Waikato and Auckland were completed in May 2025. Train users were asked to provide details of their train journeys and express their levels of satisfaction with different aspects of the service.

In chapter 4 below, it will be seen that the overall level of customer satisfaction is very high – at 98% for the 2025 survey. In this section more detailed fundings from the 2025 survey are presented.

3.6.2 Journey Quality

Figure 13 details customer satisfaction with 21 different service attributes, which in itself shows that Te Huia is a complex and multi-faceted service.

Figure 13: Customer Satisfaction with Service Attributes



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (May 2025)

The majority of passengers remain largely satisfied with overall quality of the service and its features. However, certain aspects continue to receive lower average satisfaction ratings - including onboard Wi-Fi, café service, ride smoothness, and volume of audio announcements. These findings are consistent with the 2024 Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey, which also identified these areas as having the lowest satisfaction levels. If Te Huia becomes a permanent service, there are plans to improve service features within the direct control of Council.

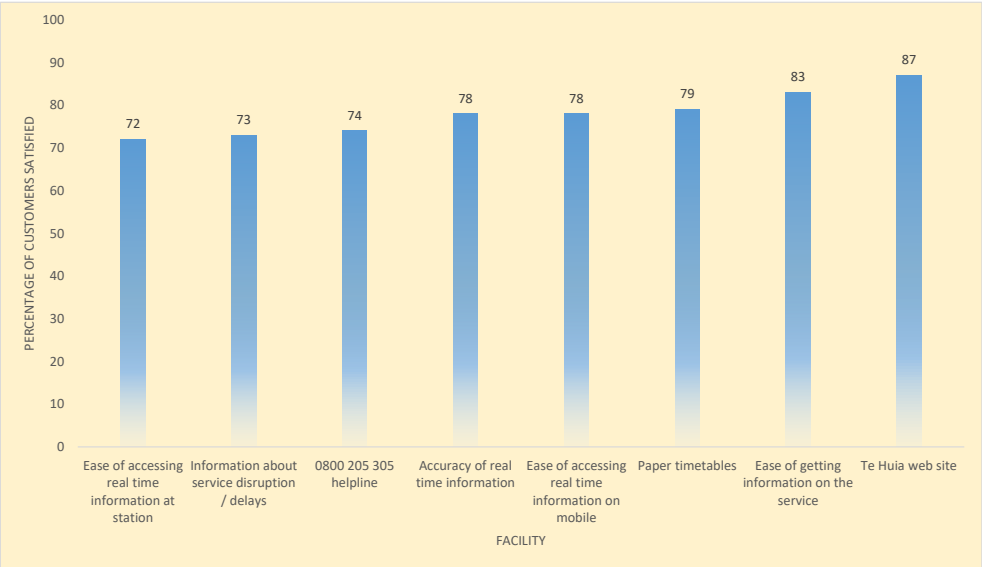
3.6.3 Journey Planning and Information

As a means of attracting more people to use Te Huia compared to driving, ease and quality of journey planning and information is an important aspect of the overall service. Figure 14 details customer satisfaction with eight aspects of journey planning and information.

Overall, the web site gets the highest rating, along with ease of getting advance information on the service. There are slightly lower (although still good) ratings for elements which involve real time (as opposed to advance static) information updates, which again is something to work on for any permanent service. Real time information for Te Huia is available through the Transit apps for example, although not everyone may be aware of this[10]. The text alert system helps to provide people with updates around service disruptions.

[10] There is a link to the Transit app on the Te Huia web site; but no real explanation as to the benefits of installing and using it.

Figure 14: Customer Satisfaction with Journey Planning and Information



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (May 2025)

3.7 Non-users

3.7.1 Introduction

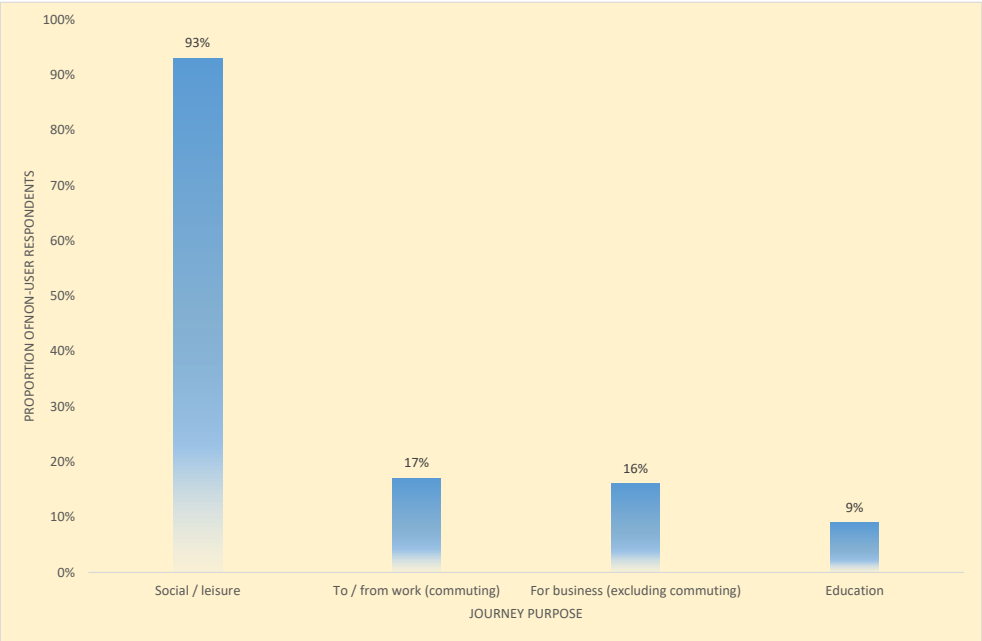
People who currently don't use Te Huia, but would consider doing so in the future, represent an important future target market. To better understand this market, the WRC in-depth survey requested the views of non-users.

3.7.2 Journey Purpose

Understanding people's journey purpose is important for considering future service provision in matters such as frequency, journey time and hours of operation. Survey respondents were asked to outline journey purpose(s) where they would consider using Te Huia, with results summarised in Figure 15 below.

Of the 3,555 respondents, 93% said they would potentially use Te Huia for social / leisure activities. Of these people, 65% stated they would only use Te Huia for social / leisure; with 30% willing to consider multiple journey purposes (i.e. including commuting and business travel). This result may reflect the current timetable and speed of Te Huia which is more attractive for leisure travellers who have a lower value of time and are therefore not put off by the relatively slow journey time.

Figure 15: Potential Journey Purpose of Te Huia Non-users

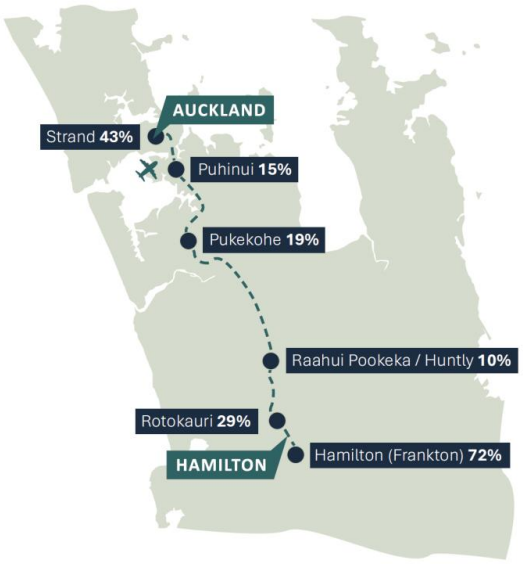


Source: Waikato Regional Council, Te Huia Survey 2025

3.7.3 Station Usage

Non-user respondents were asked to indicate which station they would board / alight if they used Te Huia in the future. Based on 3,405 respondents, Figure 16 shows that in the Waikato region, Hamilton (Frankton) would be by far the most popular potential origin / destination for current non-users, followed by Rotokauri. In the Auckland region, The Strand would be the most popular, with both Pukekohe and Puhinui each attracting less than half the number of potential passengers.

Figure 16: Potential Station Usage

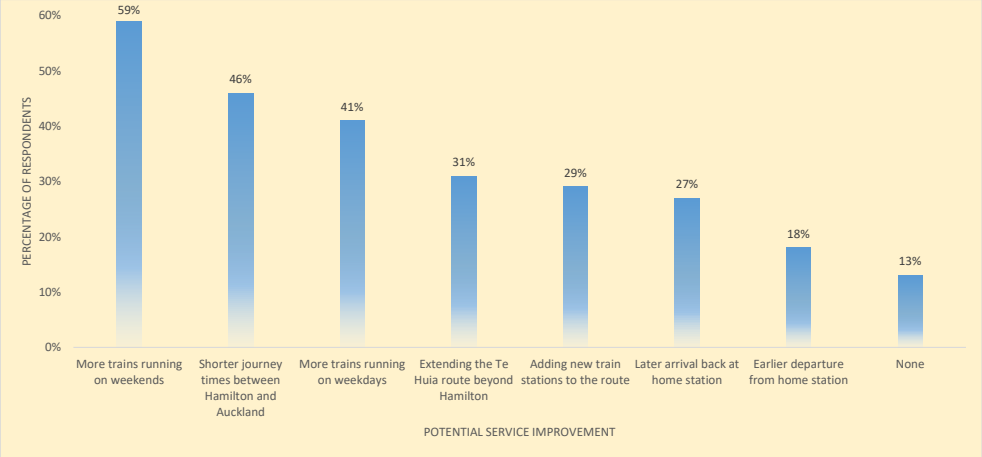


Source: Waikato Regional Council, Te Huia Survey 2025

3.7.4 Encouraging Use of Te Huia

Respondents were asked a series of questions about potential route and timetable change and the extent to which these would encourage greater use of the service. Based on 3,679 responses, Figure 17 summarises the results:

Figure 17: Potential Service Improvements to Encourage Te Huia Usage



Source: Waikato Regional Council, Te Huia Survey 2025

Reflecting the primary potential journey purpose being social / leisure, the greatest desired improvement (for over half the non-user respondents) is more trains running at weekends. This is higher than the desire for more weekday services and sandwiched in between is the desire for shorter journey times. In contrast the desire for extending beyond Hamilton and adding new stations is lower, though still significant at around a third of current non-users.

3.8 Conclusions

This chapter has provided a significant amount of information about who uses Te Huia, when they use, why they use it and how often they use it. In total just under 280,000 passenger trips have taken place between April 2021 and December 2025, recognising significant periods of time where there has been no service.

There is good data on passenger trip numbers, and it is possible to break this down into key metrics such as ticket type, trip frequency and journey purpose.

The majority of people using Te Huia are fare paying adults, more than twice the number of the next ticket type which is SuperGold card holders. These passengers can travel for free on off-peak services. Just over half of Te Huia's passengers are adults in the 25-64 age bracket.

About a third of passengers use Te Huia at least once a week – these people are most likely to be commuters and people travelling for business. The remaining two thirds who travel less than once a week are more likely to use Te Huia for leisure purposes. This means that the number of passenger trips for work and business travel purposes will be higher than implied by the percentage of people.

There is clearly a core group of regular users (primarily for work and business) supplemented by a much larger cohort of people who take the train for various non-work / business purposes (usually less regularly). The majority of this travel is between the Hamilton stations – Frankton and Rotorkauri – and Auckland. Customer satisfaction amongst all users in very high. People who use Te Huia, love it.

Nevertheless, compared to the original expectations of the 2018 SSBC, a key conclusion is that the passenger base is broader than was envisaged for a commuter service. The original weekday

timetable of two very early trains has given way to a more balanced offering across the day; and the addition of a second Saturday and single Sunday service throughout reflects the strong leisure demand. A move away from working five days a week in the office has supported the shift in focus to a broad range of journey purposes, which also means that trains are much better utilised throughout the day as they can remain in passenger service rather than sitting in a depot. The results of the non-user survey also indicate that many people perceive Te Huia as being more beneficial for leisure travel.

4 Progress Against SSBC Targets

4.1 Purpose

This chapter provides an assessment of progress against key performance indicators and targets for the Te Huia Interregional Passenger Rail Service.

The 2018 SSBC set out various problems that the Te Huia service aimed to address, and benefits that it aimed to realise. Table 5 summarises the **problems and benefits** from the 2018 SSBC:

Table 5: Problems and Benefits from 2018 SSBC

Problem Statement	Benefits
1. A significant increase in demand for travel within the Hamilton-Auckland corridor, driven by rapid growth, is reducing transport system levels of service and placing economic performance at risk.	• Improved journey times. • Improved journey time reliability.
2. Limited travel options in areas facing high growth is reducing liveability and impacting on quality of life, safety and environmental outcomes.	• Improved Access to Social and Economic Areas. • Improved Attractiveness of Potential Growth Areas.

Source: 2018 SSBC

Data presented in this report relates primarily to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and associated targets set as part of the original Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) which accompanied NZTA funding approval in December 2018 and August 2019.

For each KPIs and target, data is presented for all five years of the service – recognising that there have been various periods when Te Huia has not operated as scheduled. For each KPI and target there is an explanation of the performance data.

4.2 Passenger Numbers

4.2.1 Weekdays

The KPI is average weekday demand (passengers per day).

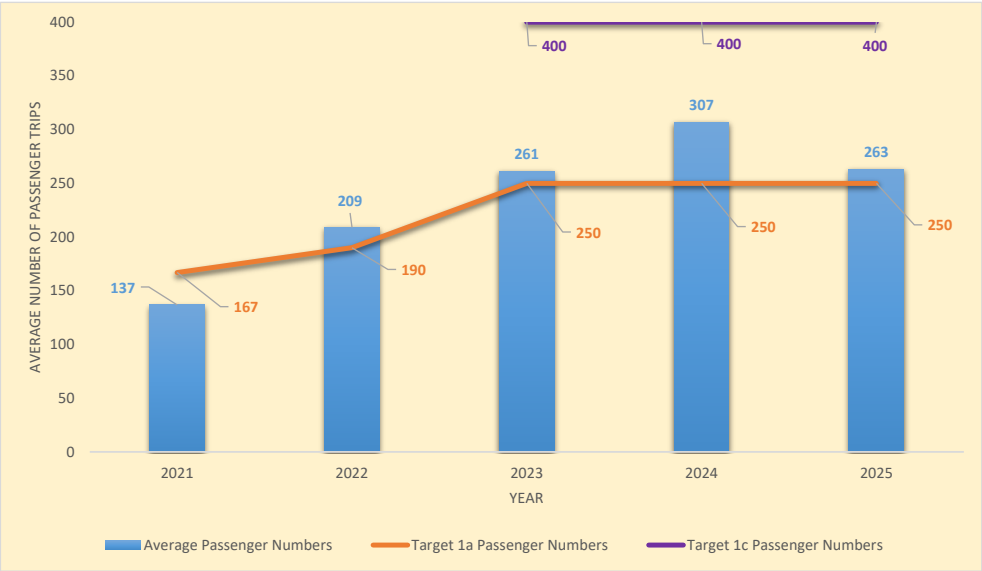
Two targets were set:

- **1a: 250 passengers per day three years after the start up service** – an investment objective set at the time of funding approval in August 2019 (see Figure 1 above).
- **1c: 400 passengers per day** - stretch target requested by NZTA officials in mid-2022.

Data for the passengers per day targets comes from a mix of Bee card transactions supplemented by a smaller number of cash payments. Figure 18 below shows average weekday passengers per year against targets 1a (orange line) and 1c (purple line).

The first year of the service (2021) was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, passenger numbers were below target 1a. April 2022 was the first month where Te Huia achieved the weekday target 250 passenger trips. In each year between 2022 to 2025 target 1a has been exceeded. The best annual performance in 2024 reflects the fact that there were fewer engineering works service disruptions compared to both 2023 and 2025. The year 2024 also saw introduction of additional return services on Thursdays and Fridays, which helped to increase passenger numbers.

Figure 18: Performance Against Targets 1a and 1c (Average Weekday Passenger Numbers)



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

The figures show that Te Huia has not achieved target 1c (400 weekday passenger trips) and it is important to set out the context. At the inaugural meeting of the Te Huia Train Service Subcommittee on 17 June 2022, a Council report requested support for an NZTA proposal to revert targets to passenger demand forecasts included in the SSBC – 400 one-way passenger trips. The report stated that due to the five-month pause in the service, and impacts of COVID-19 on passenger demand, updated targets needed to be set. WRC officers provided updated patronage forecasts, based on performance to date, market research and (crucially) necessary improvements to the Te Huia service offering. The report acknowledged that amended performance targets would be very difficult to achieve without investment in new services, which had previously been declined by the NZTA Board. Nevertheless, amended targets were seen by WRC as being a necessary requirement for any future additional funding request to NZTA, and to demonstrate commitment to increase patronage of the service. The NZTA perspective was that Te Huia had to demonstrate greater passenger growth before additional investment could be made.

Whilst WRC has made incremental and beneficial improvements to services within existing budgets (as shown in chapter 2 above), a step change in service frequency necessary to achieve the stretch target has not been financially supported by NZTA. Furthermore, engineering work on the Auckland Metro network has resulted in significant disruption to Te Huia services in 2023, and most recently in 2025 - negatively impacting passenger numbers.

In 2023, temporary speed restrictions (TSRs) resulting from the Auckland Rail Network Rebuild and Papakura to Pukekohe electrification had a severe impact on service punctuality. The THIPA report catalogued the 2023 delays in detail – 369 incidents in total. Between August and December of that year on-time performance did not exceed 60% (having been nearer to 90% for most of 2022).

The year 2025 has seen a new challenge. A change to the method of undertaking pre-City Rail Link (CRL) engineering works by KiwiRail has seen regular repeated blocks of line (BOLs) since Christmas 2024. Tabl6 6 shows that there were nine line closures (mostly over holiday periods), and **54 weekdays in 2025** (around 20% of the annual total) when Te Huia has not run a service that was previously scheduled prior to the BOL:

Table 6: Operating Weekdays Lost to Blocks of Line

Date	Number of Days Lost
January (summer holidays)	18
April (Easter holidays)	9
May	1
June (Matariki)	1
July (winter holidays)	10
September / October (school holidays)	10
October (Labor Day weekend)	1
November	1
December (summer holidays)	3
Total	**54**

Source: KiwiRail Block of Line Calendar

The impact of BOL closures has been compounded by the fact that Te Huia is busiest in the school holidays – when there is a mix of both commuters and leisure users (especially families). The impact on average weekday passenger numbers in 2025 has been a 16% reduction compared to 2024. In comparison, because of the BOL, the Auckland Metro Southern Line has seen a 21% reduction in passenger numbers between January and July 2025, compared to the same period in 2024.

If Te Huia passenger growth had continued at the 2022-24 average of 11% per year, average weekday trips in 2025 would have been around 350 – much closer to the stretch target of 400. Therefore, reduction in passenger numbers in 2025, and inability to progress further towards target 1c, is the result of factors completely outside of Te Huia's control.

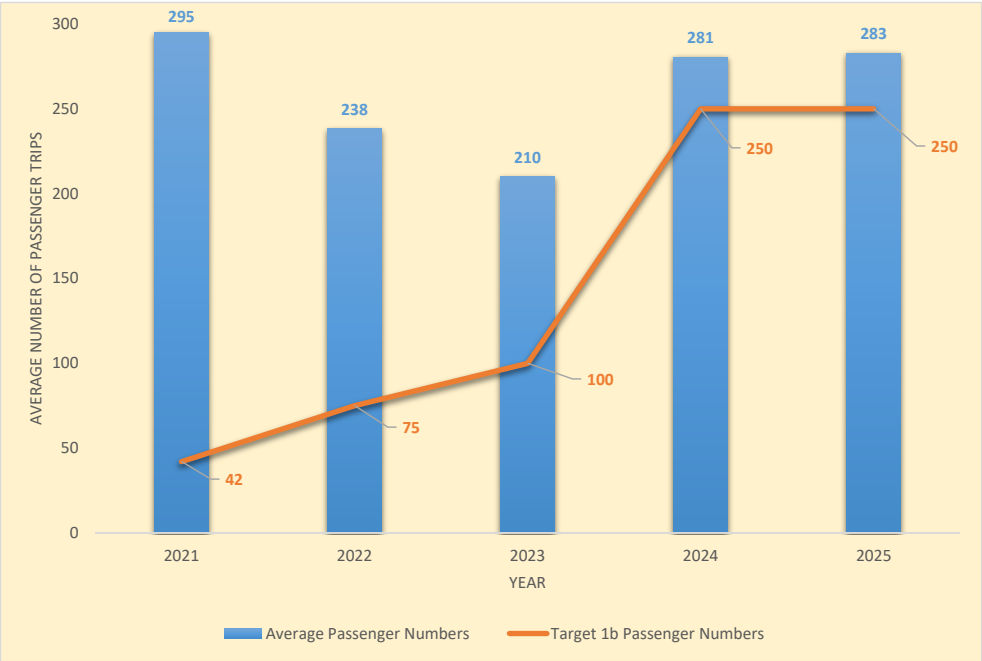
4.2.2 Saturdays

The KPI is average Saturday demand (passengers per day). **Target 1b is 250 passengers per day three years after the start up service.** Data for the target comes from a mix of Bee card transactions supplemented by a smaller number of cash payments. Figure 19 shows average Saturday passenger numbers per year against target 1b.

Demand for Saturday services has equalled or exceeded target 1b in every year up to 2025. The 2021 data is based on a relatively small number of service days (eight Saturdays in total); but interestingly these ran through to Auckland (The Strand) which did not happen on weekdays at that time.

Subsequent years provide a more representative picture. Performance has been strong in both 2024 and 2025. Saturdays in 2025 appear to have been less affected by the 15 BOL days because there are more discretionary leisure trips which can often be rescheduled to times when the train is still running. Furthermore, the doubling of the Saturday service in February 2024 has provided a boost to patronage compared to 2023 and 2022. Introduction of the Sunday service in July 2025 may also have benefitted Saturdays as it now means that overnight travel in both directions over the weekend is now possible.

Figure 19: Performance Against Targets 1b (Average Saturday Passenger Numbers)



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

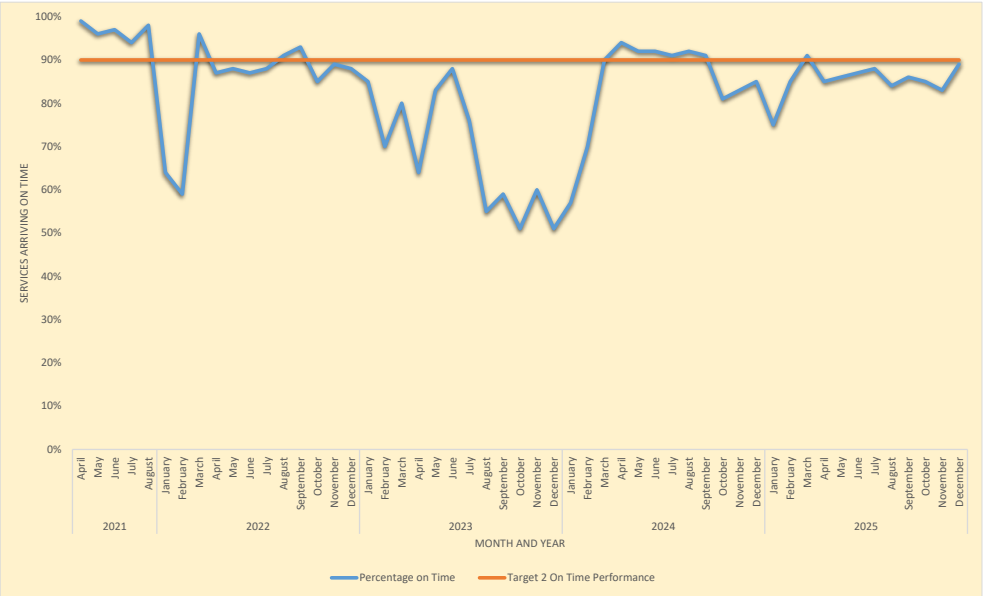
4.3 On Time Trips

The KPI is trips arriving within five minutes of schedule. **Target 2 is 90% of services arriving no more than five minutes behind schedule.** Data comes from reports by operator KiwiRail. Figure 20 shows on time performance against target 2.

For the first few months, on time performance exceeded the target until the service was suspended because of the Auckland COVID-19 lockdown in August 2021. Following resumption of services, most of 2022 continued to see performance close to, or sometimes above, the 90% target. Things went downhill from December 2022 until early 2024, with most months seeing on time performance dip below 70% and occasionally closer to 50%.

The THIPA identified the primary cause as being engineering works on the Auckland Metro network, including the imposition of multiple Temporary Speed Restrictions (TSRs). Since then, performance has improved significantly. March to September 2024 saw performance above the target. However, punctuality has dropped away since then, although still well above the low point of 2023. Over the whole service duration since April 2021, average on time performance is 82% against the target of 90%.

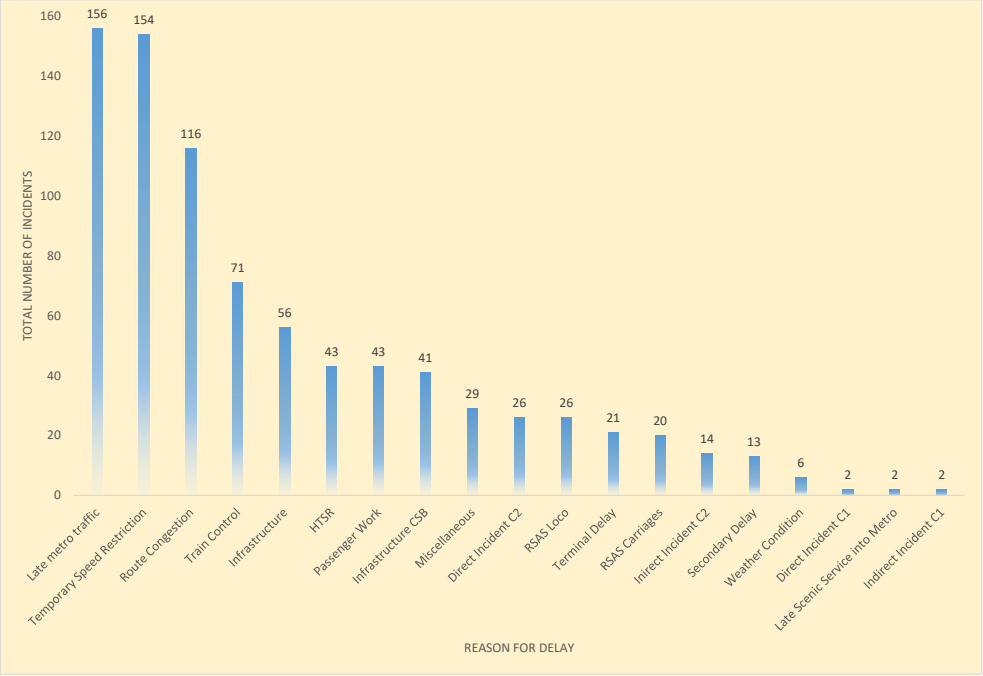
Figure 20: Performance Against Target 2 (Services Arriving Within Five Minutes of Schedule)



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Performance Reports

The reasons for each service delay are recorded and categorised by the train crew and are shown on Figure 21.

Figure 21: Reasons for Service Delay



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Performance Reports

As only one reason is recorded per service, the total number of 841 delay incidents between April 2021 and August 2025 is high, and reflects a combination of:

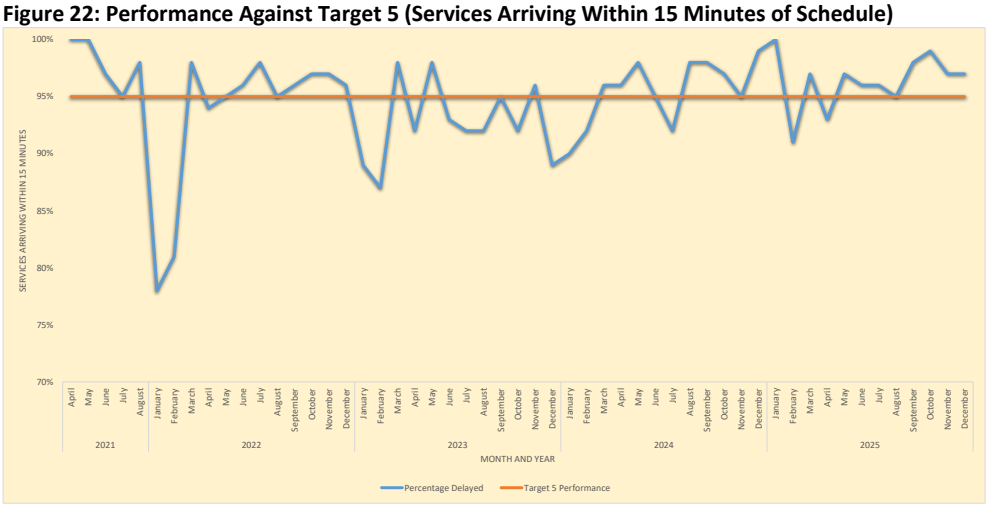
- Significant congestion in the Auckland Metro network, with Te Huia being regularly stuck behind local services with no opportunity to pass (271 incidents).
- Poor condition of the rail infrastructure asset and temporary speed restrictions because of work necessary to fix it (154 incidents).

Very few incidents of delay are the direct responsibility of Te Huia – the main two categories being locomotive faults (26) and carriage faults (20).

4.4 Delayed Trips

The KPI is trips arriving within 15 minutes of schedule. **Target 5 is 95% of services arriving no more than 15 minutes behind schedule.** Data comes from reports by operator KiwiRail. Figure 22 shows on time performance against target 5.

Figure 22: Performance Against Target 5 (Services Arriving Within 15 Minutes of Schedule)



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Performance Reports

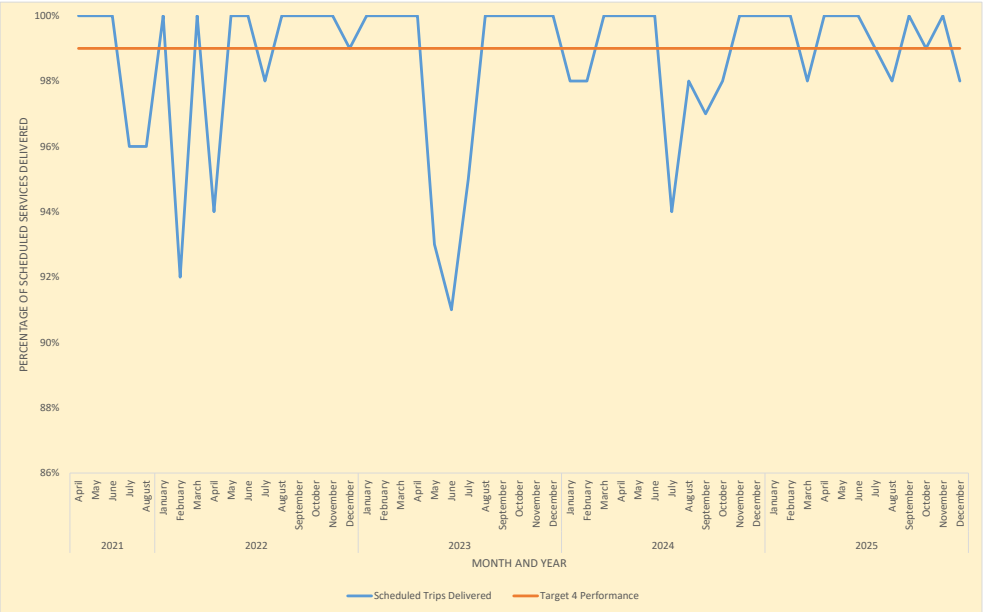
There is a higher target of 95% for delayed services over 15 minutes in duration; and performance has been better than target 2, suggesting that most delays are between 5 and 15 minutes duration. Except for early 2022, performance has always been above 85% and average over the whole service duration is 95% (on target). This means that the majority of delays to Te Huia are not over 15 minutes, the point at which passenger satisfaction with the journey is likely to deteriorate significantly.

4.5 Scheduled Trips Delivered

The KPI is scheduled trips which ran and were not cancelled at short notice. This KPI therefore does not include cancellations which have resulted from a planned block of line. **Target 4 is 99% of scheduled trips delivered.** Data comes from reports by operator KiwiRail. Figure 23 shows on time performance against target 4.

The scheduled trips target is rightly demanding, as service cancellations leave people without an option and are unacceptable from a passenger perspective. In 36 out of 52 service months until December 2025, Te Huia met or exceeded the 99% target. There have only been six months when performance has been 95% or lower. The average over the whole service duration is 99% (on target). This is an impressive performance, given the potential levels of disruption from engineering works and the inevitable incidents which occur within and adjacent to a rail system. Where trains cannot run scheduled services, replacement buses ensure that a means of travel is still provided. There have been 57 individual replacement bus services since April 2021.

Figure 23: Performance Against Target 4 (Services Delivered)

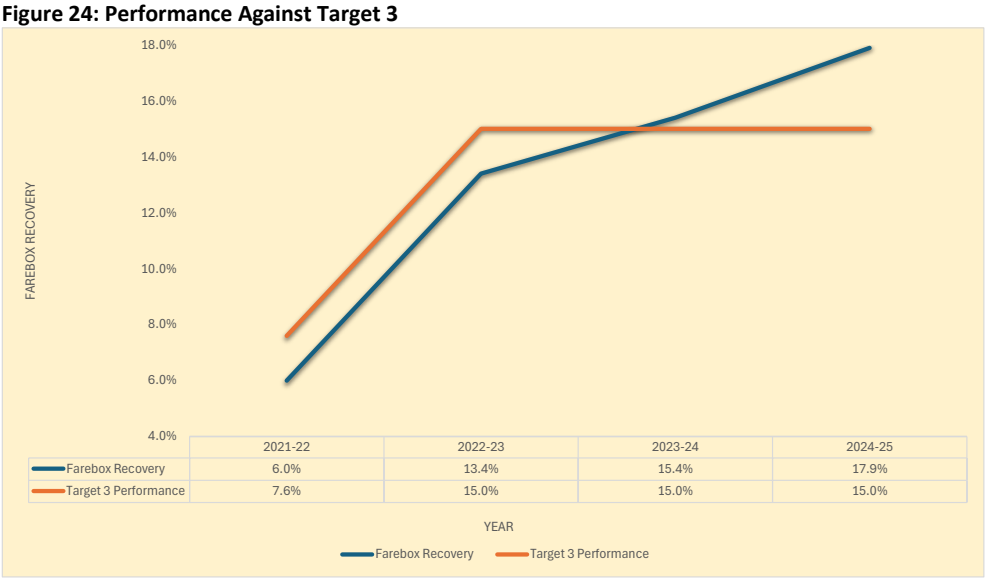


Source: KiwiRail Monthly Performance Reports

4.6 Farebox Recovery

The KPI describes the proportion of service gross operating costs which are met by income from passenger fares. **Target 3 is a farebox recovery ratio of 15%**. Data comes from the Bee card system and cash fares. Figure 24 shows farebox recovery against target 3.

Figure 24: Performance Against Target 3



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Performance Reports

After a slow start in 2021-22, farebox recovery tracked close to the target in 2022-23 and slightly exceeded it in 2023-24. Since then, an independent financial review recommended increases to Te Huia fares which, when implemented, have resulted in farebox recovery further exceeding the target

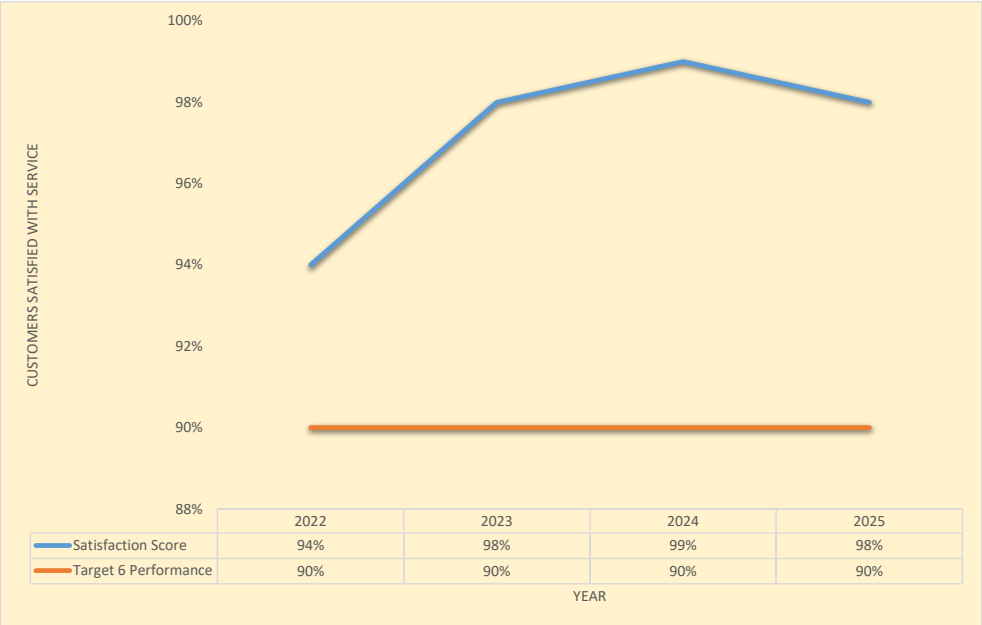
in 2024-25[11]. This demonstrates that Council is taking government policy to increase private share (the major element of which is fares) very seriously. A further review of fares across the region is currently taking place and further changes are likely to have a positive impact on farebox recovery.

It is also worth noting that Te Huia generates some income from the café and sales of branded merchandise, which increases the private share contribution of the service beyond the farebox recovery number.

4.7 Customer Satisfaction

The KPI describes the proportion of Te Huia customers who are satisfied with the overall service. Target 6 is overall customer satisfaction of 90%. Data comes from the annual customer satisfaction survey, which generally gains around 500 responses from people who use the service. Figure 25 shows performance against target 6.

Figure 25: Performance Against Customer Satisfaction Target



Source: Te Huia Customer Satisfaction Survey (May 2025)

Despite disruptions from COVID-19, TSR delays and now repeated blocks of line, Te Huia remains a hugely popular service with people who use it. The target of 90% has been exceeded in every year of the customer satisfaction survey.

4.8 Conclusions

Based on the analysis in sections 4.2 to 4.8 above, Table 7 provides a summary of the extent to which Te Huia targets have been achieved.

The table shows that six of the eight targets have met or exceeded the target; one (punctuality) is within 10% of target and only the stretch target for passenger trip numbers has not been met. Given the challenges which have been faced by Te Huia – which the original business case could never have anticipated when making forecasts – this constitutes very good performance. Te Huia has established itself as an important part of the region's public transport network and also performs an increasingly important function for Auckland too.

[11] Fares increased by 20% in July 2024 and a further 10% in July 2025.

Table 7: Te Huia Performance Summary

KPI	Description	Performance: T = Target and A = Actual									
		2021*		2022		2023		2024		2025	
		T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A	T	A
1a	Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	167	137	190	209	250	261	250	307	250	263
1b	Average Saturday demand (passengers per day)	42	295	75	238	100	210	250	281	250	283
1c	Amended target: Average weekday demand (passengers per day)	-	-	-	-	400	261	400	307	400	263
2	On-time trips arriving within 5 minutes (%)	90	96.8	90	84.6	90	68.5	90	84.8	90	85.3
3	Farebox Recovery (%)	-	-	7.6	6.0	15.0	13.4	15.0	15.4	15.0	17.9
4	Scheduled trips delivered (%)	99	98.4	99	98.6	99	98.3	99	98.6	99	99.3
5	Delayed trips within 15 minutes of timetable (%)	95	98.0	95	93.4	95	92.8	95	95.5	95	96.3
6	Overall customer satisfaction (%)	-	-	90	94	90	98	90	99	90	98

* Incomplete year four months (April to August 2021)

Colours:

Meets or exceeds target
Within 10% of target
Over 10% below target

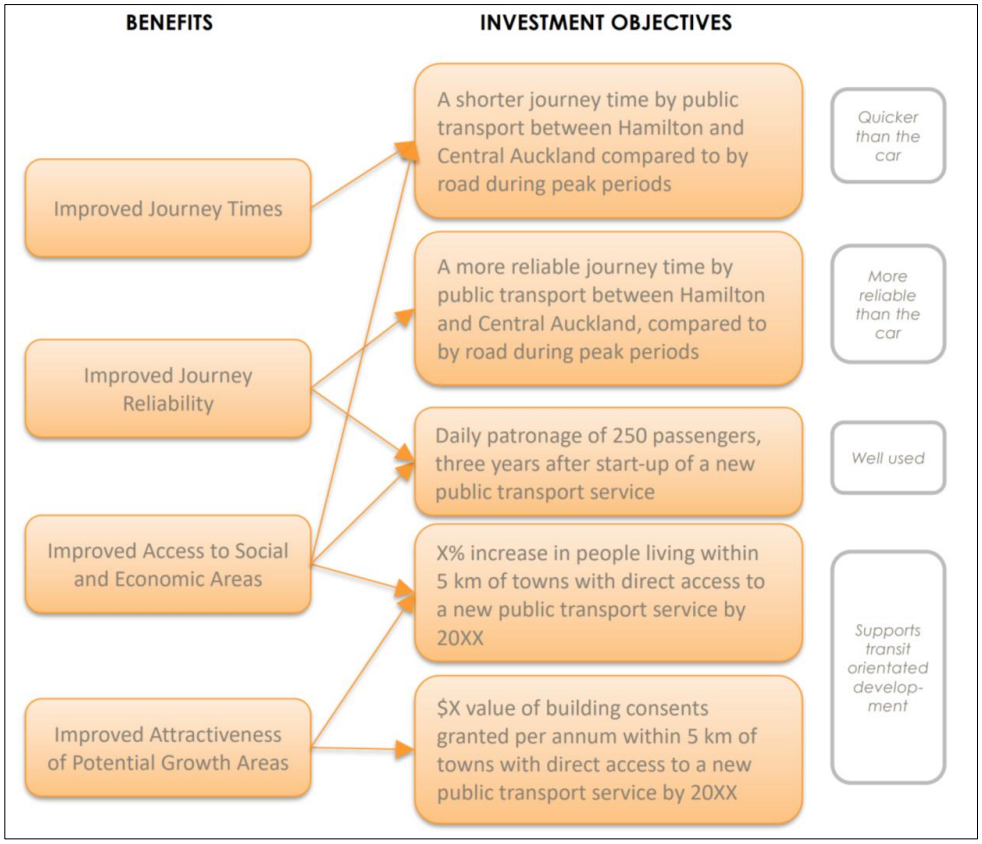
For what is still a relatively slow and infrequent train service – albeit much improved from the original timetable – Te Huia has actually performed remarkably well. With promises of significantly lower service disruption and opening of City Rail Link (CRL) later in 2026 there are opportunities to consolidate and further improve the service if it becomes permanent.

5 Progress Against Investment Objectives

5.1 Introduction

The 2018 Te Huia SSBC set out several **benefits** and **investment objectives** which are summarised in Figure 26. The patronage KPI (250 passengers after three years of the service) is assessed as being met (seen chapter 4 above), and so not discussed further here. The remainder of this chapter discusses conclusions that can be drawn from available data in relation to the other four benefits and investment objectives.

Figure 26: SSBC Benefits and Investment Objectives



Source: 2018 SSBC

5.2 Journey Times

The SSBC KPI was "a shorter journey time between Hamilton and Central Auckland compared to road during peak periods".

Comparative journey times between Te Huia and equivalent car travel on State Highway 1 provide an indication of the level of service that the train offers to people travelling between Hamilton and Auckland.

Satellite navigation data for car travel provided by NZTA can be compared with actual train performance (from KiwiRail) to assess comparative journey times as summarised in Table 8. The data covers four time periods and northbound travel (Hamilton to Auckland) from 2022 to 2025. The various metrics are described as follows:

- Quartile 1 (one quarter of all journey times are lower than this figure).
- Quartile 3 (three quarters of all journey times are lower than this figure).
- Median (half of all journey times are higher than this figure, and half lower).
- Average (sum of all journey times divided by total number of journeys).

Table 8: Comparative Northbound Journey Times for Car and Te Huia (2022-25)

Metric	Journey Times (Minutes)				
	Car (6.00-7.00am)	Car (7.00-8.00am)	Car (8.00-9.00am)	Car (6.00-9.00am)	Te Huia
Quartile 1	93.6	101.6	103.4	96.9	149
Quartile 3	105.4	122.5	126	119.5	161
Median	98.5	111.7	115.2	107.7	158
Average	100	112.5	115.3	109.2	156.9

Source: NZTA and KiwiRail

The table shows that Te Huia has a significantly higher journey times across all metrics and car time periods. Journey times across the two quartiles are 30% lower for car (6.00-9.00am) than train. Between 8.00-9.00am (the busiest peak hour) this reduces slightly to 27%. For both median and average journey times, Te Huia currently takes (respectively) 50.3 and 47.7 minutes longer. Performance of the train has not been helped by the significant punctuality challenges in 2023. The longest timetabled Te Huia journey should take 150 minutes, and both median and average times clearly exceed that.

Faster journey times are generally seen as more desirable as they minimise travel which is often assumed to be non-productive. Whilst this is generally the case for the car, train travel offers passengers an ability to work productively during the journey especially as Te Huia offers wifi, charging points and table space. This means that, whilst still important, faster journey times are only one aspect of the package which can make train travel more attractive.

5.3 Journey Time Reliability

The SSBC KPI was “a more reliable journey time between Hamilton and Central Auckland compared to road during peak periods”.

Comparative journey time reliability between Te Huia and equivalent car travel on State Highway 1 provides another indication of the level of service that Te Huia offers to people travelling between Hamilton and Auckland. Reliability describes the variation in journey times between train and car for equivalent time periods – for example the same times each day of the week. Reliability is important because people value consistency when planning their day. If the same journey takes very different lengths of time from one day to the next, people are forced to plan for the worst case scenario, which means that their perceived journey time is higher than the average one. If mode A offers a more reliable daily journey time than mode B, people may choose mode A - even if for some of time (and on average) mode B is faster.

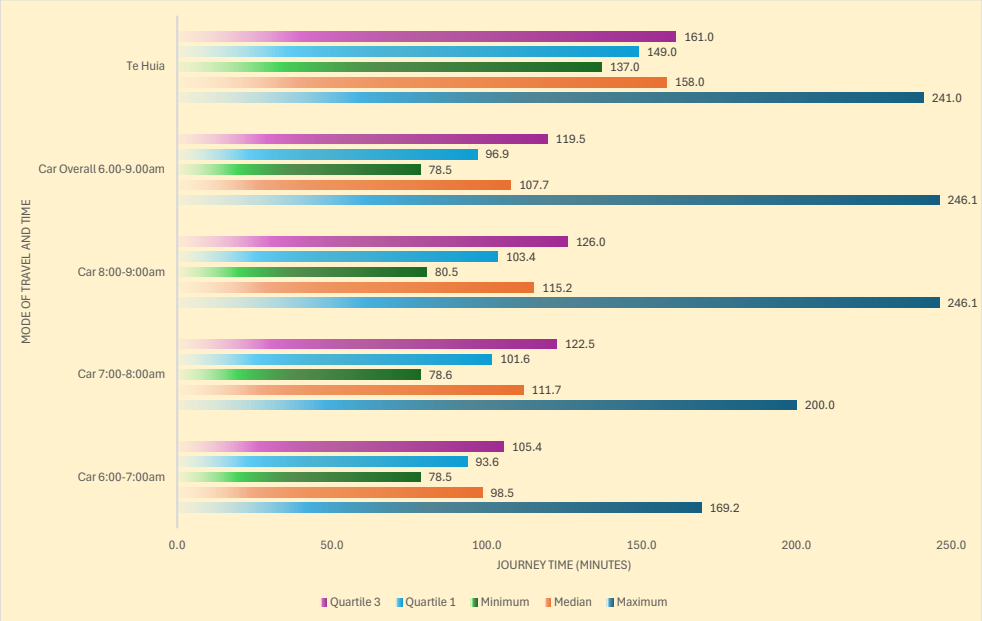
Using the same NZTA and KiwiRail data, Figure 27 below shows the following indicators of journey time for the car versus train:

- Quartile 3 (three quarters of all journey times are lower than this figure).
- Quartile 1 (one quarter of all journey times are lower than this figure).
- Minimum (fastest journey time of all).
- Median (half of all journey times are higher than this figure, and half lower).

- Maximum (slowest journey time of all).

For each mode and time period, the bigger the difference between these indicators the more variable the journey time. Comparing the minimum (i.e. fastest) journey time with the median is the best way to illustrate variability.

Figure 27: Comparative Journey Time Variability for Car and Train (2022-25)



Source: NZTA and KiwiRail

For car travel, the smallest overall journey time variability is 20 minutes between minimum and median between 6.00am and 7.00am. After that time, traffic congestion on the Auckland Southern motorway results in higher journey time variability for car travel:

- 7.00am to 8.00am: 33.1 minutes between minimum and median.
- 8.00am to 9.00am: 34.7 minutes between minimum and median.
- 6.00am and 9.00am: 29.2 minutes between minimum and median.

Although total journey times are higher than the car equivalent, Te Huia has the second smallest variability – 21 minutes between minimum and median – for all the travel times. The fastest rail journey time (137 minutes) is also well below the maximum for all car time periods (246.1 minutes), which indicates the potential for train to be competitive for some peak time journeys where congestion makes State Highway 1 very slow. The slowest rail journeys (those higher than the median) are relatively few in number and reflect extreme delays which are not normal. Further reducing rail journey times could further improve journey time reliability as long as the timetable is based on a realistic assessment of operational capacity.

5.4 Accessibility to Train Stations

The SSBC KPI was: "x% increase in people living within five kilometres of towns with access to a public transport service by 20xx". This KPI is too broad to make for sensible analysis; a more focussed one would measure total population living within five kilometres of Te Huia stations (which will be a more conservative figure).

Accessibility describes ability of people to get to and then board a public transport service – typically at a bus stop or train station – and then travel to where they need to go. For people who do not

have access to a private car – or cannot physically drive - public transport can be an essential lifeline and not just a nice to have. People who can drive may choose to use public transport because it offers them a safer, productive and enjoyable experience.

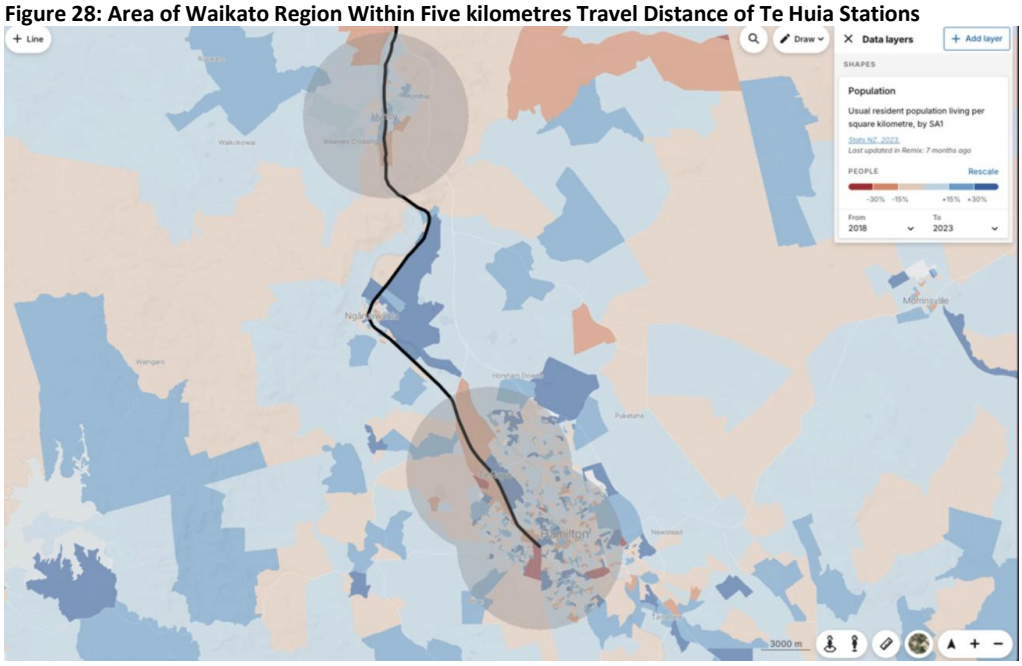
Provision of a new Te Huia train service since April 2021 has increased the level of accessibility to the Waikato regional public transport network through three stations:

- Hamilton (Frankton).
- Rotokauri.
- Huntly.

People can access these stations by car (either as a driver or passenger), motorcycle, bus, pedal cycle and on foot.

Using the Remix public transport software, for the three new stations in the Waikato region, Figure 28 shows the extent of the geographic area within this five kilometre catchment – covering almost all of the Hamilton urban area.

Figure 28: Area of Waikato Region Within Five kilometres Travel Distance of Te Huia Stations



Source: Remix Analysis by Via

In totality, at the 2023 census 169,600 people now reside within five kilometres of Frankton, Rotokauri and Huntly stations. Te Huia has therefore brought train services within a five kilometre travel distance for 34% of the Waikato region's population.

5.5 Value of Building Consents

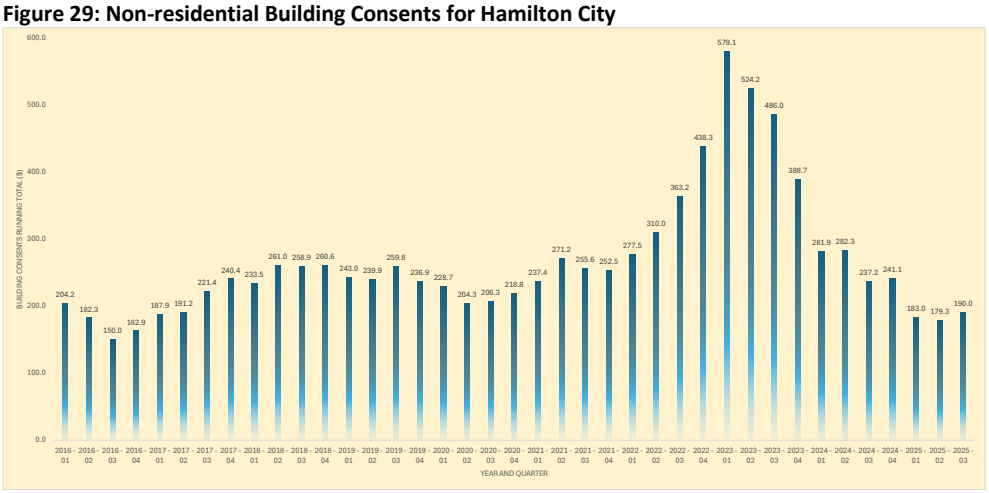
The SSBC KPI was "$x value of building consents granted per annum within five kilometres of towns with access to a public transport service by 20xx".

There are links between the provision of train services / infrastructure and access to existing and new development areas and thereby generating additional economic activity. The MOT states:

"Rail is a major contributor to national and regional economic growth. It reduces emissions, congestion, road deaths and injuries, delivers wider social benefits, and provides resilience and connection between communities."[12]

Building consents are an important indicator of economic activity and the construction sector strongly contributes to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Figures for the Hamilton City Council area are available from Infometrics Quarterly Economic Monitor (QEM)[13] for both non-residential and residential consents and shown in Figures 29 and 30.

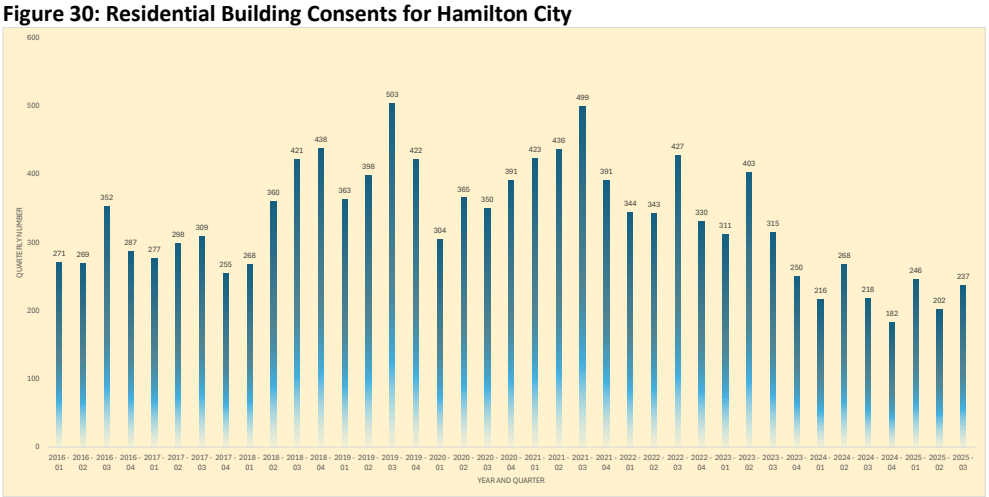
Figure 29: Non-residential Building Consents for Hamilton City



Source: Infometrics Quarterly Economic Monitor

In Figure 29 each bar on the graph represents the cumulative value of the last four quarters – so for example the highest figure of $579.1 million represents the period from 2022-02 to 2023-01. Whilst there has been a noticeable increase in the value of non-residential building consents from Q4 2021 to Q3 2022 it is difficult to prove that this only the result of introducing Te Huia. There are wide range of contributory factors around performance of the economy and changes to the regulatory environment, to name just two.

Figure 30: Residential Building Consents for Hamilton City



Source: Infometrics Quarterly Economic Monitor

[12] MOT | Future of Rail

[13] Residential consents and Non-residential consents

In Figure 30, each bar represents the number of building consents granted in that quarter, and there is no indication of total value. There is no discernible pattern in the data and therefore impossible to establish any link with Te Huia train service provision.

5.6 Conclusions

Whilst less significant than the SSBC targets, evidence of progress against the wider investment objectives is still an important part of the Te Huia story.

On the positive side, chapter 4 shows that the 250 passengers per day target has been met. Furthermore, the presence of Te Huia has opened up interregional rail travel to a large potential market – around a third of the region's population being within five kilometres of a station.

The slow journey times relative to the car continue to be a source of concern, but the reasons are primarily related to infrastructure capacity and performance challenges that are beyond Te Huia's control. The success of Auckland Metro passenger services and the strong presence of freight means that the limited line capacity – two or three tracks between Pukekohe and Waitemata – do not enable faster interregional trains to pass slower ones. The line south of Pukekohe is still primarily used and maintained with slower freight services in mind, which is understandable given their importance to the Golden Triangle.

As a timetabled service, Te Huia can provide a more reliable journey time than the car alternative which is subject to the vagaries of traffic congestion north of the Bombay Hills. Despite improvements to State Highway 1, the level of congestion may well increase in future as a consequence of the significant new development in the south of Auckland. Therefore, if Te Huia becomes a permanent service, and journey time improvements are delivered through additional infrastructure investment outlined in the Auckland Rail Programme Business Case (PBC), this reliability advantage may get more significant. It is also important to emphasise that Te Huia enables productive work in a way that is simply not possible in a car.

In terms of wider economic impacts, the 2018 SSBC was somewhat ambitious to propose that a five-year (and relatively infrequent) trial rail service would have a discernible impact on indicators such as building consents. Whilst there is anecdotal evidence that some people have taken Te Huia into account when making house location decisions, a faster and more frequent permanent service is more likely to make a material contribution to future economic development along the Hamilton to Auckland corridor. The intent of the spatial planning work in 2018 is still valid, and a Future Services Single Stage Business Case is now examining a wider economic benefits framework in more detail.

6 Operational Performance

6.1 Introduction

Whilst chapter 4 has outlined performance against key operational targets – in relation to service punctuality and provision – there are other performance metrics which are important to report against. These include:

- Operating revenue.
- Operating costs.
- Cost efficiency.
- Funding.
- Operating environment.
- Health and safety.
- Environmental performance.
- Substitution of car trips.

Te Huia has had robust Operations Plan, based on guidance provided by NZTA and approved by the NZTA Chief Executive prior to service launch. KiwiRail monthly progress reports are essential for various governance groups to understand performance and take any necessary remedial action. Each report provides the following information:

- Executive summary of passenger numbers, use of the hoist for disabled people, punctuality and reliability.
- Operational scorecard for:
    - Each Te Huia service consistency (monthly data on punctuality, reliability and number of passengers).
    - Te Huia operation (fare revenue, operational expenditure, passenger feedback, health & safety, and staff training).
- Financial information, both costs and revenues.
- More detailed breakdown for each operational item, including explanations for significant variances and issues, especially in relation to health and safety.

6.2 Operating Revenue

There are two main sources of revenue for Te Huia:

- Passenger fares.
- On-board café.

Smaller amounts of revenue accrue from sales of Te Huia merchandise. Table 9 summarises the operating revenue for the four completed financial years of the Te Huia service. The items in italics – half price fares, SuperGold and Community Connect – are reimbursements from the Government for revenue that has been foregone because of these discounts.

Table 9: Te Huia Operating Revenues

Metric	2021-22*	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Passenger fares and catering ($)	224,275	379,765	718,979	965,237
Half price fares ($)	-	*369,993*	-	-

Metric	2021-22*	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
SuperGold ($)	*11,731*	*15,321*	*245,011*	*264,494*
Community Connect ($)	*-*	*-*	*19,359*	*15,859*
Total Revenue ($)	**236,006**	**765,079**	**983,349**	**1,245,590**

* Based on seven months

Source: KiwiRail

The table shows that revenues have climbed steadily as a result of both passenger numbers increasing and higher fares (raised by 20% in 2024 and 10% in 2025).

6.3 Gross Operating Costs

Te Huia is operated by KiwiRail under contract to Waikato Regional Council (WRC). Te Huia has a cost-plus contract in place. KiwiRail charges WRC for all gross operating costs incurred plus a monthly service fee (a percentage of the operating cost).

Gross operating costs reflect all of the elements which make up the Te Huia service, including:

- Staffing.
- Locomotive and carriage leasing.
- Fuel.
- Track user and access charges.
- Asset maintenance (including trains and stations).
- Equipment and supplies (including catering).

Table 10 summarises the operating revenue for the four completed financial years of the Te Huia service.

Table 10: Te Huia Gross Operating Costs

Metric	2021-22*	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Gross operating cost ($)	3,922,496	5,718,891	8,017,493	6,971,266
Operating days (number)	162	279	280	260
Gross cost per operating day ($)	24,213	20,498	28,634	26,813

* Based on seven months

Source: KiwiRail

Gross operating costs have varied over the years of Te Huia in response to both service disruptions (when Te Huia has not run) and changes to levels of service (additional services on some days of the week). The increase in gross operating cost per operating day in 2023-24 reflects the higher number of services from February 2024 onwards. The reduction in gross operating costs for 2024-25 reflects the blocks of line where services were not operated as originally intended. Differences in gross cost per operating day can also be explained by changes to variable costs such as fuel prices.

6.4 Cost Efficiency

6.4.1 Definition

Cost efficiency measures the relationship between investment in Te Huia (often referred to as "subsidy") and the outcomes it achieves, in particular train services operated, revenue generated and passenger trip numbers. Therefore, efficiency can be a more sophisticated approach to assessing performance than gross operating cost alone. Most analysis in this section comes from an

independent financial review undertaken in mid-2024; supplemented by additional more recent work.

In this section, there is a distinction between gross operating costs (i.e. total service cost) and net operating costs (i.e. gross cost minus revenue).

6.4.2 Operating Revenues, Costs and Subsidies

Comparisons of operating revenues, gross costs and net costs provide an overall indicator of financial performance, as set out in Table 11.

Table 11: Te Huia Operational Revenues and Costs

Metric	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Revenue ($)	**236,006**	**765,079**	**983,349**	**1,245,590**
Service journeys (number)	596	1,003	1,130	1,204
Passenger trips (numbers)	36,679	72,078	79,560	73,679
Revenue per service journey ($)	396	763	870	1,035
Revenue per passenger trip ($)	6.43	10.61	12.36	16.91
Gross operating cost ($)	**3,922,496**	**5,718,891**	**8,017,493**	**6,971,266**
Net cost ($)	**3,686,490**	**4,953,812**	**7,034,144**	**5,725,676**
Net cost per service journey ($)	6,185	4,939	6,225	4,756
Subsidy per passenger trip ($)	100.50	68.73	88.41	77.71

Source: KiwiRail

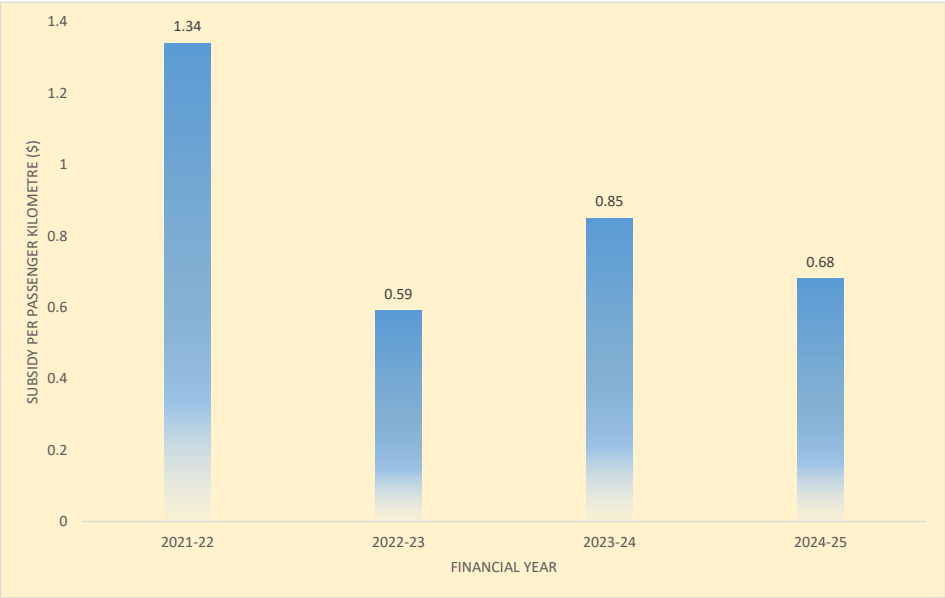
Net cost is obtained by subtracting total revenue from gross cost. The year 2023-24 was a relatively poor performing year in terms of revenues versus gross costs, which is reflected in the high net cost figure. Higher fares have significantly improved performance in 2024-25 by boosting revenue received – both in total and per passenger trip. There has been a more than doubling of revenue per service journey since 2021-22 and a consequent reduction in net cost per service journey.

One measure of passenger subsidy is to divide annual net operating costs (after accounting for fare and third party revenue) by the number of passengers in that same period. Table 11 shows subsidy per passenger trip for each financial year (01 July to 30 June).

The data shows that the truncated 2021-22 financial year (based on seven months of data) had the highest subsidy per passenger trip, as demand for the service was relatively low. The significant decrease in subsidy per passenger trip in 2022-23 was reflected significantly more people travelling by train, with costs remaining relatively stable. The increase in passenger demand was also partly down to the government's half price fare scheme. In 2023-24 additional investment in service improvements, starting in February 2024, was reflected in an increase in subsidy per passenger (as demand did not peak until May of that year). However, in 2024-25 there was a decrease in subsidy per passenger trip because of higher demand in the latter half of 2024 and lower costs (from blocks of line) from December 2024 through to June 2025. The interplay between passenger demand and operational cost is a complex one and has varied from year to year.

Subsidy per passenger is a very crude measure because it does not reflect the distance that passengers travel on the train, and hence the benefit that people receive for money invested in the service. At 114 kilometres Te Huia has a much higher average journey length than Auckland Metro train or most Waikato bus services. Therefore, subsidy per passenger kilometre is a more informative measure. Figure 31 therefore summarises subsidy per passenger kilometre for each financial year. There has been a 50% decrease in the figure between 2021-22 and 2024-25.

Figure 31: Te Huia Subsidy Per Passenger Kilometre



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

It is interesting to compare this figure with that in Auckland. An RNZ news article from March 2024[14] stated that:

"NZTA figures show the subsidy per person using the Auckland Metro train service last financial year was $12, but with an average trip of 12 kilometres - it worked out to $1 of subsidy per passenger kilometre."

If the RNZ figures for Auckland are correct, in 2024-25 the Te Huia subsidy per passenger kilometre was significantly lower than that of the Auckland Metro train service. To claim, as some have, that Te Huia is one of the most heavily subsidised services in the country is therefore incorrect.

6.5 Funding

Like other public transport across New Zealand, Te Huia is funded by a combination of passenger fares and public funding. The public funding requirement is equal to the gross operating cost, less fare revenue. Funding is dynamic – if fare revenue is higher, then public funding will be lower and vice versa. From 01 July 2024, public funding for Te Huia is split as follows:

- Waikato Regional Council (WRC) – via targeted rate: 26.70%.
- Waikato District Council (WDC) – via general rate: 3.30%.
- NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) – via National Land Transport Fund: 70%.

For 2024-25, each rateable property in Hamilton paid a uniform annual charge of $20 and then $10.88 per $100,000 of capital value (up to $5 million).

Table 12 summarises the relative contributions between NZTA and local partners over the first four full years of Te Huia:

[14] How does Te Huia's subsidy compare to roads? | RNZ News

Table 12: Te Huia Funding Contributions

Metric	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25*
Net costs ($)	**3,686,490**	**4,953,812**	**7,034,144**	**5,725,676**
NZTA	2,783,300	3,740,128	5,310,779	4,007,973
Local share	903,190	1,213,684	1,723,365	1,717,703

* NZTA contribution reduced to 70% (compared to 75.5% in previous years).

Source: KiwiRail

Following the two-year review, NZTA decided that Te Huia would progressively receive reduced subsidy – from 75.5% to 70% in 2024-25 and then down to 60% in 2025-26. WRC has funded the reduction in NZTA contribution via the $2.2m of reserve funds accumulated due to the postponed service launch, COVID-19 lockdowns, and delayed rollout of service improvements in 2023.

6.6 Operating Environment

6.6.1 Introduction

The rail operating environment describes a variety of factors which describe non-financial measures of performance, which are of particular interest to passengers and wider stakeholders. The rail network is highly constrained and regulated, through a sophisticated signalling system which ensures that tracks are occupied by trains which are supposed to be there. Trains themselves are complex assets which are controlled both by traditional engineering (for example traction systems and engines) and more modern software.

This section of the report therefore summarises key aspects of the operating environment, specifically:

- Service punctuality.
- Unexpected service cancellations.
- Train kilometres and failures.
- Health and safety.
- Environmental performance.
- Substitution of car trips.

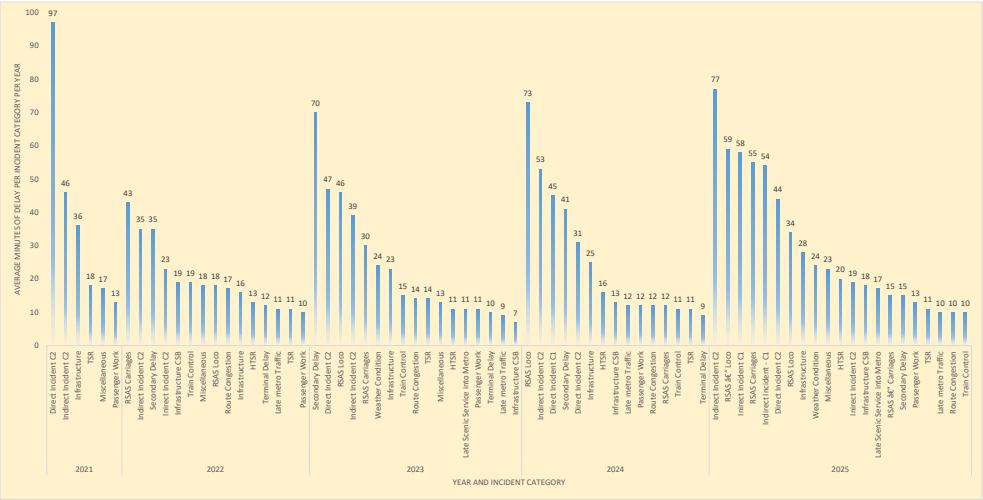
6.6.2 Service Punctuality

As has been described in chapter 4, Te Huia has run within a very challenging operating environment which has led to adverse impacts on both service punctuality and ability to run services at all. Each KiwiRail monthly report details every service delay or cancellation, including its cause and impact. Figure 16 in chapter 4 above details the number of incidents by category since Te Huia commenced in April 2021. Figure 32 below shows average delay minutes per incident per year. For each year the delay categories are listed in order from largest average delay to smallest.

The highest average delay minutes per incident per year are from categories that are relatively uncommon but high impact. The most common categories – late Metro trains, temporary speed restrictions and route congestion – have much lower average delays per incident but affect a far higher number of trains and passengers.

From January 2022, when Te Huia resumed after the five month COVID-19 hiatus there have been consistent service delays every month due to maintenance and renewal work on the tracks. The imperative to keep track workers safe means that operating speeds have been reduced past work sites. This situation has had knock-on impacts when Te Huia has missed its timetabled path and became stuck behind freight, Auckland Metro or KiwiRail Scenic services.

Figure 32: Average Delay Minutes Per Incident Per Year



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Reports

By 2023, as reported by the Te Huia Interim Performance Assessment, delays had severely impacted on service punctuality to a degree that was never anticipated by the 2018 Single Stage Business Case (SSBC). Punctuality performance (on-time trips) targets were achieved in 2021, but suffered in 2022 and especially 2023 because of major engineering works on the Auckland Metro network, including:

1. Rail Network Growth Impact Management (starting in 2020), a programme of rail infrastructure renewals to catch up on previous deferred maintenance.
2. Papakura to Pukekohe electrification project[15] (commenced 2021, due for completion 2025), including:
    a. Electrification of southern line between Papakura and Pukekohe.
    b. Construction of new stations in Drury and Paerata.
    c. Rebuild of Pukekohe railway station.
3. Wiri to Quay Park capacity upgrades, including Third Main line between Wiri and Westfield[16].
4. Auckland Rail Network Rebuild (RNR)[17] stage 1 (closure of part of Southern Line increasing traffic on Eastern Line) – January to March 2023.
5. Auckland RNR stage 2 (closure of Eastern Line requiring Te Huia to travel via Southern Line through Newmarket to the Strand) – March to December 2023.

When Te Huia commenced operations, from Papakura northwards, the train was routed via Southern Line as far as Otahuhu – 12 AT Metro trains per hour (tph) - before running into the Strand along the Eastern Line (6tph). The RNR changed the number of trains per hour on different sections of the AT Metro network, which meant that Te Huia timings had to fit in where there was lower operational capacity.

In the three months of Stage 1 (January to March 2023), running along the Eastern Line, Te Huia continued to be amongst 9tph of Metro services instead of the usual 6tph, because of additional services replaced trains on the closed Southern Line. In the nine months of RNR stage 2 (April to

[15] Bringing electric trains to Pukekohe | KiwiRail
[16] The Third Main line | KiwiRail
[17] Rail Network Rebuild (at.govt.nz)

December 2023), when the Eastern Line was then closed, Te Huia operated amongst 9tph of Metro services between Westfield and Newmarket and 15tph between Newmarket and the Strand.

For the latter nine months of the 2023, closure of the Eastern Line resulted in Te Huia being caught up in disruptions around Newmarket – a location where Te Huia was never timetabled to run. Newmarket was (and is) very congested and unforgiving for delayed trains. Therefore, any lateness of the Strand-bound Te Huia services - often the result of Temporary Speed Reductions (TSRs)[18] elsewhere - resulted in further delays around Newmarket, which would have been avoided on the Eastern Line. Similarly, any late despatch from the Strand into a normal 6tph of Eastern Line services would have been relatively easy to accommodate; but much harder into the 9tph on the Eastern line of RNR stage 1, and 15tph of the Newmarket area in RNR stage 2.

Compounding all the above was the gradual worsening of the state of the Auckland Metro network. There were more TSRs in 2023 than seen in 2022. This meant trains were more likely to have missed their timetable slot, and compounded delays in a network that had very little redundancy to enable recovery time.

Out of 369 recorded incidents of Te Huia train delays in 2023, the majority were in the Auckland Metro area – the consequence of RNR works, other major engineering projects, general network deterioration and occasional extreme weather. Table 13 shows the top ten locations for delays related to TSRs and other direct network-related delays (i.e. excluding incidents such as train faults, boarding / alighting delays, trespassers on the line, lineside fires etc.).

Table 13: Top Ten Locations for Network-related Delays

Network Delay Location	Number of Recorded Incidents
Papakura / Puhinui to the Strand	93
Newmarket station and approaches	57
Papakura station and approaches	42
Remuera station and approaches	40
Papakura to Pukekohe	26
Huntly loop and approaches	25
The Strand station and approaches	25
Horotiu area	23
Puhinui station and approaches	20
Parnell station and approaches	18
Total	**369**

Source: KiwiRail Operational Reports

The same locations for Te Huia delays kept cropping up on multiple occasions, with Papakura station and the line north to Newmarket and the Strand constituting the top four locations (232 incidents in total). On numerous occasions, Te Huia services were slowed north of Papakura because they could not pass AT Metro services, which may also have been delayed by a TSR or other issue. Te Huia services were also frequently delayed leaving stations where they had called, almost always to wait for a Metro train.

As shown in Table 14 below in total there were 140 specific recorded instances of delays resulting from waiting for Metro services in 2023, and occasionally a freight service or even the long-distance Northern Explorer (17 specific recorded instances of both). As a long-distance service which

[18] Explained by KiwiRail as follows: "In certain situations we slow the speed of trains over a section of track - a temporary speed restriction – to ensure they can travel safely. We might do this when the rail gets very hot and risks buckling, while we are awaiting a permanent track repair, or after we've laid new track to give it time to 'bed in'."

operated as semi-express within Auckland, Te Huia appeared to have been afforded very little priority compared to every other type of train.

Table 14: Reasons for Te Huia Delays

Type of Delay	Number of Recorded Incidents
TSR (weather)	27
TSR (maintenance)	75
TSR (unspecified, likely to be maintenance)	37
Mechanical issue (Te Huia)	25
Mechanical issue (other service)	8
Waiting for freight train or Northern Explorer	17
Waiting for AT Metro train	140
Signal Passed at Danger (other services)	3
Signal Passed at Danger (Te Huia)	1
Passengers boarding / alighting	32
Anti-social behaviour on board	4
Total	**369**

Source: KiwiRail Operational Reports

The remaining locations outside of the top ten collectively added up to 86 incidents, with no other single location exceeding ten. Outside of the Metro network, Horotiu (between Hamilton and Ngāruawāhia) and Huntly had the biggest challenges with TSRs and Te Huia waiting for other services to pass. Elsewhere outside of the Auckland Metro area, issues were few and had no clear pattern.

Another significant cause of Te Huia delay was 139 individually recorded TSRs[19] - whether for engineering works, extreme heat, flooding or safety reasons (usually associated with poor condition of track or formation). Where a specific reason for the TSR was noted, three quarters related to maintenance and a quarter to extreme weather (usually heat).

TSRs meant that normal speeds necessary to keep to the Te Huia timetable could not be maintained, resulting in delays throughout the journey. There were frequently knock-on impacts further down the line, as Te Huia did not arrive at a critical signal location when it should have done and therefore had to wait for another train to pass. This often happened several times on a single journey.

The number of incidents where a delay was caused by a Te Huia train fault was relatively small (25 in total in 2023), and complete locomotive or carriage failures were rare (which explains the excellent performance when it comes to services fulfilled). The biggest operational challenges were passenger management, either people arriving late or delays in boarding (32 such incidents were recorded in 2023) or causing issues with aggressive anti-social behaviour (four incidents).

6.6.3 Unexpected Service Cancellations

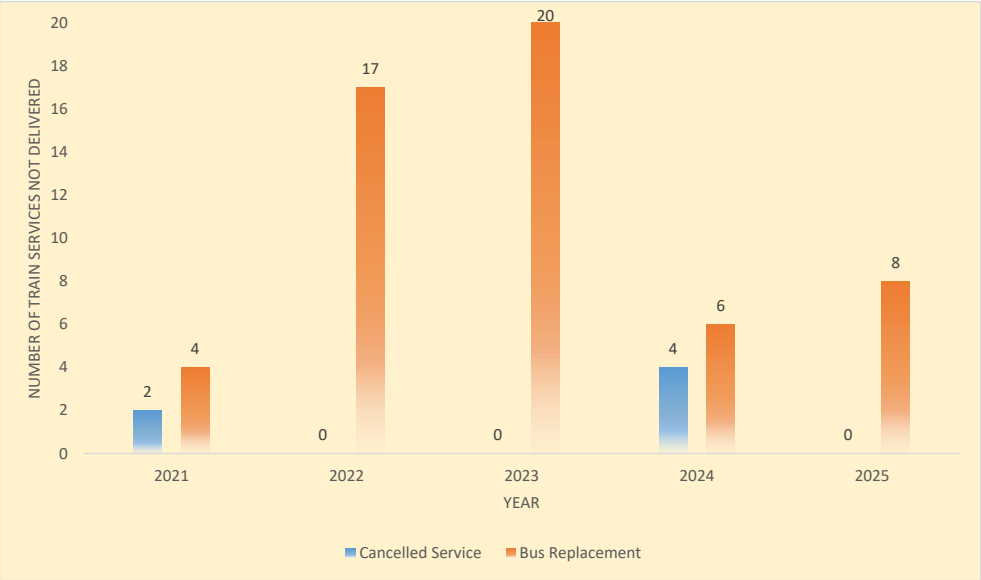
Cancelled services are one of the most serious challenges when it comes to encouraging people to use any form of public transport. If people cannot rely on a service to turn up, it becomes very difficult to persuade people to use it.

Aside from the blocks of line issue beyond its control, Te Huia has performed very well in terms of timetabled services delivered and met its target. Figure 33 shows that in most cases, when a service

[19] In addition, there are other delays which are not specifically attributed to TSRs in the KiwiRail reporting but could be.

was unexpectedly cancelled on most occasions a bus replacement was provided so people could still get to their destination.

Figure 33: Unexpected Service Cancellations



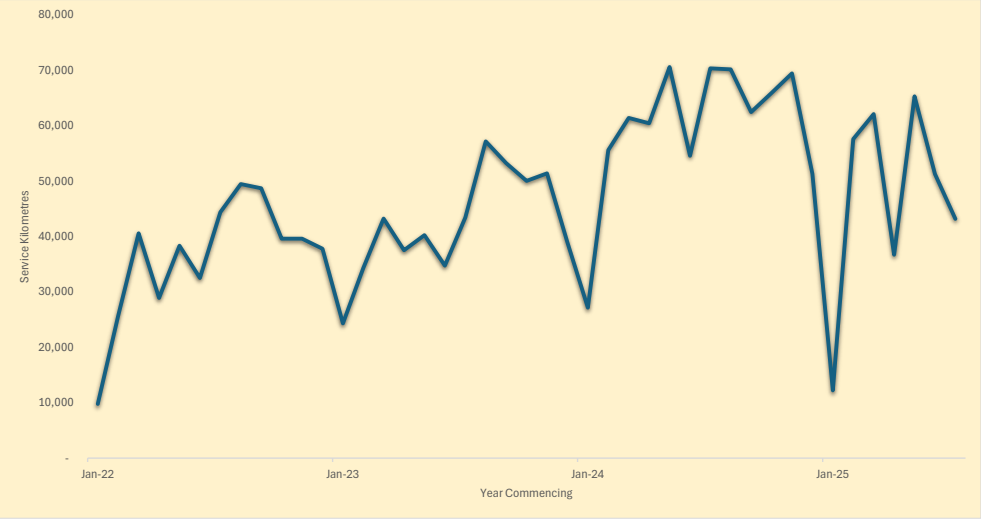
Source: KiwiRail

6.6.4 Train Kilometres and Failures

Given that Te Huia is operating 1970s carriages and diesel locomotives originally designed for freight usage, the high level of service reliability is a good reflection of operational performance. In terms of total distance, between April 2021 and December 2025, Te Huia has travelled 3,117,954 service kilometres – the equivalent of four return trips from earth to the moon.

Figure 34 below shows the distance travelled every month since April 2021.

Figure 34: Te Huia Service Kilometres

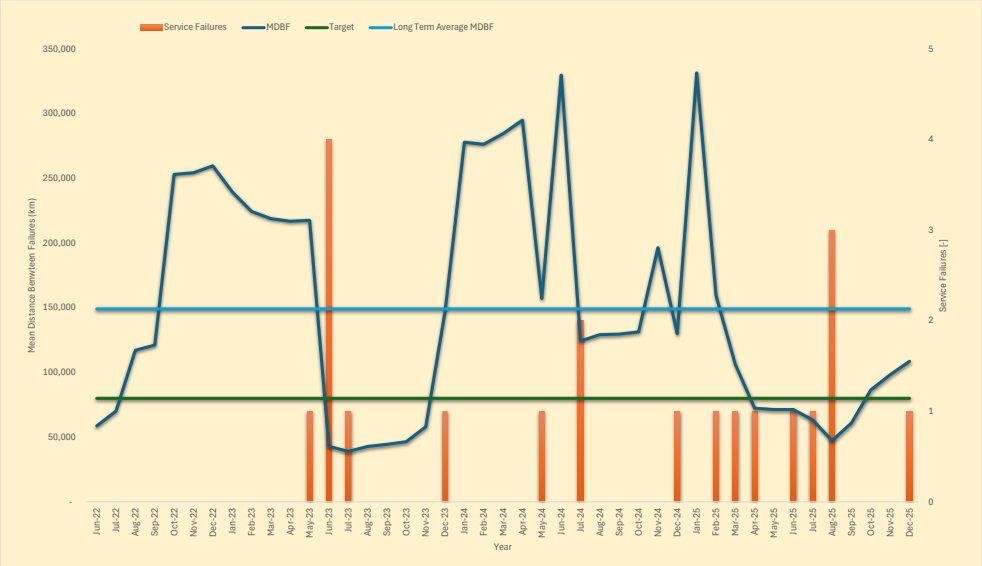


Source: KiwiRail

The graph shows significant dips in service kilometres in each Christmas and new year time period. There has been an increase in service kilometres since additional Thursday, Friday and Saturday services were introduced in February 2024.

Figure 35 below provides information on both individual train failures - the orange bars - and the standard measure of reliability of mean distance between failures (MDBF) – the dark blue line. The term "failure" describes any type of fault with either locomotive or carriages – from the relatively minor (such as vestibule door fault) to the more fundamental (for example brake failures).

Figure 35: Te Huia Service Kilometres



Source: KiwiRail

The higher the distance between failures, the more reliable the assets are. There have only been two periods when the MDBF has dipped below target – the second half of June 2023 and April to October 2025. The rest of the time the trains have performed well above target (the green line), and the overall average MDBF (lighter blue line) over the whole time period is well above too.

6.7 Health and Safety

6.7.1 Introduction

The railway is a highly constrained operating environment which is rightly subject to rigorous safety standards that reflect its good safety record compared to roads. The Australian Railway Association (ARA) 2024 report *The Benefit of Rail to New Zealand*[20] concluded that rail travel involves significantly fewer crashes than road, due to the lack of structured operating environment and level of driver training for the latter. The report concluded that an absence of any rail services in New Zealand would lead to eight additional deaths and 202 additional serious and minor injuries combined through road crashes each year.

Passenger and freight services are managed by signalling systems which aim to ensure that collisions are avoided, through only one train occupying a section of track. Signals Passed at Danger (SPADs) are serious events and relatively rare – for example from 01 July 2022 to 30 June 2023 there were 33 SPADs across the entire rail network.

[20] ARA_Benefit_of_Rail_New_Zealand_REPORT_August_2024.pdf

Contrast this high level of compliance with that of road vehicles at level crossings. A recent study for KiwiRail[21] showed that data derived from observations of over 3,600 drivers, revealed a high non-compliance rate: 47% of motorists failed to stop at level crossings equipped with Stop or Give Way signs.

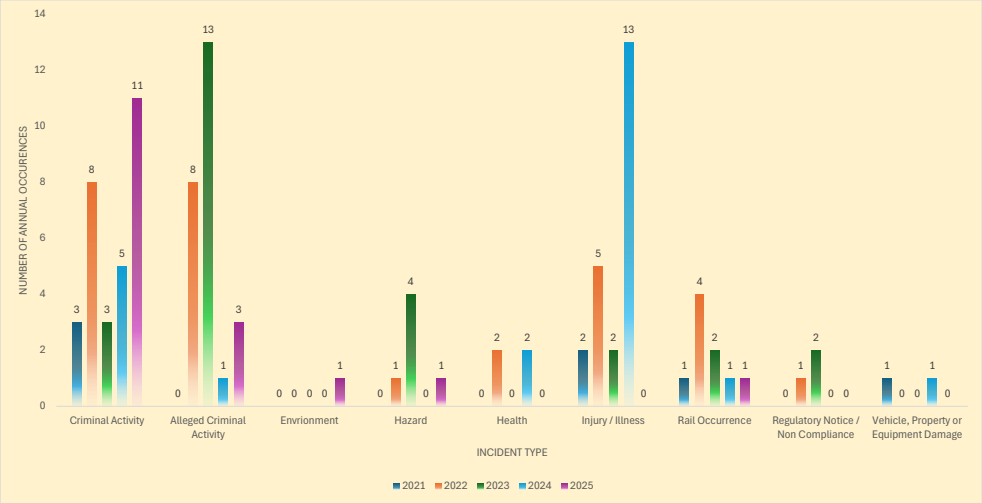
6.7.2 General Health and Safety

Health and safety incidents are included within KiwiRail's monthly reports provided to Council. Categories that KiwiRail report against are:

- Criminal activity.
- Alleged criminal activity.
- Environment.
- Hazard.
- Health.
- Injury / illness.
- Near miss.
- Rail occurrence.
- Regulatory notice / non-compliance.
- Vehicle, property, or equipment damage.

Figure 36 summarises health and safety incidents in each year. The are the result of criminal or alleged criminal behaviour – primarily tagging of trains and anti-social behaviour on board the service (often involving passengers consuming their own alcohol).

Figure 36: Summary of Health and Safety Incidents By Year



Source: KiwiRail Monthly Reports

The spike of "health" incidents in 2014 are also often actually the result of anti-social behaviour but have been reported differently. There is, in reality, often little difference between actual and alleged criminal activity. The KiwiRail monthly reports contain detailed information on the incidents and any

[21] NZ Level Crossings: Motorist Safety & KiwiRail Study Findings - Railway News

required follow-up steps. They present a concerning picture of the verbal and physical abuse that Te Huia staff and law-abiding passengers sometimes have to contend with.

There is also reporting on internal (staff-based) health and safety performance metrics, specifically staff training and drug / alcohol testing. Reports show that all staff training has been kept up to date and there have been no drug / alcohol testing failures.

6.7.3 Notifiable Events

Following two Signal Passed at Danger (SPAD) incidents on 17 June and 10 July 2023, NZTA acting as the rail regulator issued a prohibition notice to KiwiRail, preventing Te Huia passenger rail services from entering the Auckland Metro area after 11 July. This resulted in Te Huia terminating at Papakura rather than the Strand, with passengers having to then take a Metro service further into Auckland.

Following rapid and detailed work to address safety concerns of the regulator, including further training for locomotive engineers and testing of train systems by KiwiRail, NZTA lifted the suspension on 27 July, with services recommencing to the Strand on 07 August 2023.

Both weekday and weekend passenger numbers from 12-31 July 2023 suffered as a result and are lower than equivalent days in 2022. There was a strong bounce back in August (assisted by WRC offering a week of free travel upon service resumption) and three of the five subsequent months for the remainder of 2023 have seen higher numbers of passengers compared with 2022.

6.7.4 Safety Case

Prior to service commencement, Te Huia was provided with a five-year safety case until end of April 2026. For trains to continue running after this period, a revised safety case is required to be approved by NZTA as the rail regulator.

The Te Huia carriages were strongly constructed in the United Kingdom (in the 1970s) and reinforced further in New Zealand when converted to the SA/SD class. The carriages are in good condition with new glazing, so would perform well in collision or rollover situation in terms of keeping people contained, preventing intrusion or collapse. But, like an older road vehicle, because the carriages are so rigid they would transfer more of any collision shock through to occupants. A newer carriage or multiple unit would have a crumple zone at each end to soften the impact, and this is very hard to retrofit to old rolling stock. The Te Huia carriages might also move vertically against each other in a collision (one trying to override the other), though this is something KiwiRail has taken steps to control by fitting new couplers.

Therefore, at the time of writing (February 2026) Te Huia carriages are undergoing detailed technical assessment, including:

- Bodywork corrosion.
- Fire retardance.
- Internal crashworthiness.
- External crashworthiness.

Depending on the results of the technical assessment there may be a requirement for further work to be undertaken as part of the safety case – either before or after NZTA approval.

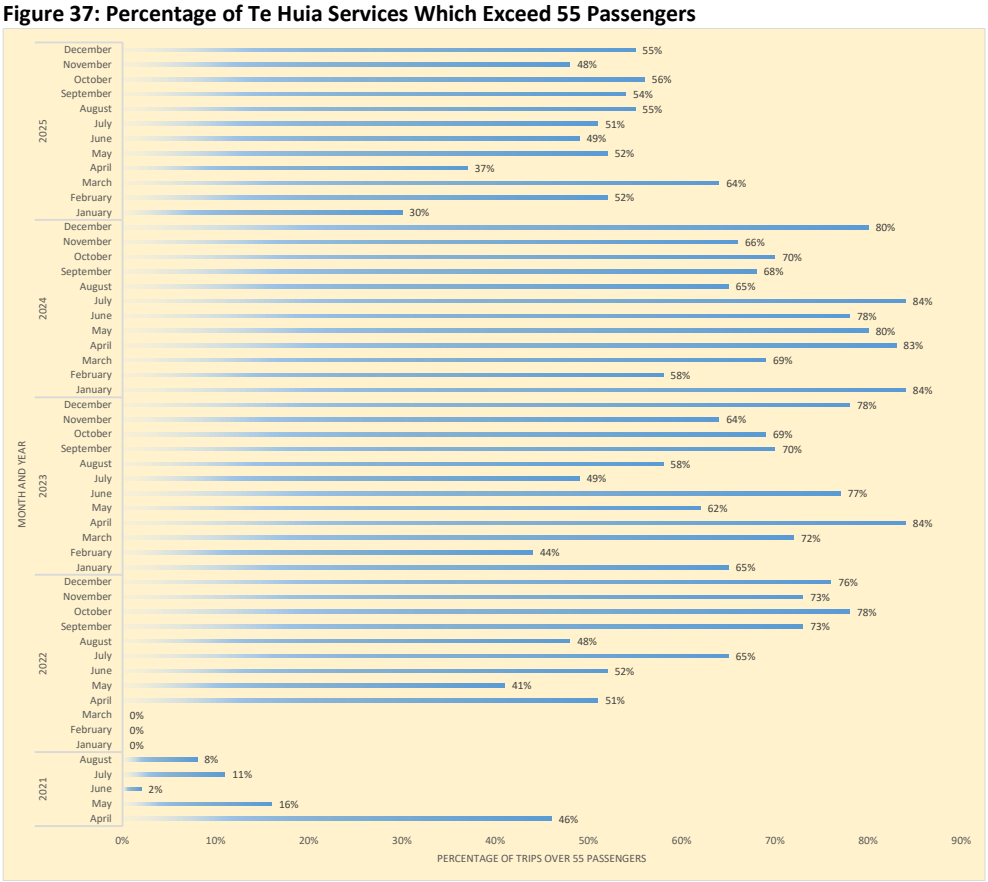
Te Huia locomotives have been fitted with Electronic Train Protection (ETP), which automatically stops the train if it passes a red signal. The introduction of European Train Control System (ETCS) capability to the DL locomotives is (at the time of writing in February 2025) being implemented. ETCS manages speeds and driver alerts when approaching signals and is therefore a means of reducing risk of SPAD incidents and the consequences of them.

6.8 Environmental Performance

Based on operational data from the KiwiRail sustainability team, supported by information on provided by the Ministry of Environment, any Te Huia train which has more than 55 people on board will deliver lower greenhouse gas emissions per passenger trip compared to the equivalent number of cars.

Figure 37 summarises the percentage of Te Huia services in each month which exceeded this 55 passenger threshold.

Figure 37: Percentage of Te Huia Services Which Exceed 55 Passengers

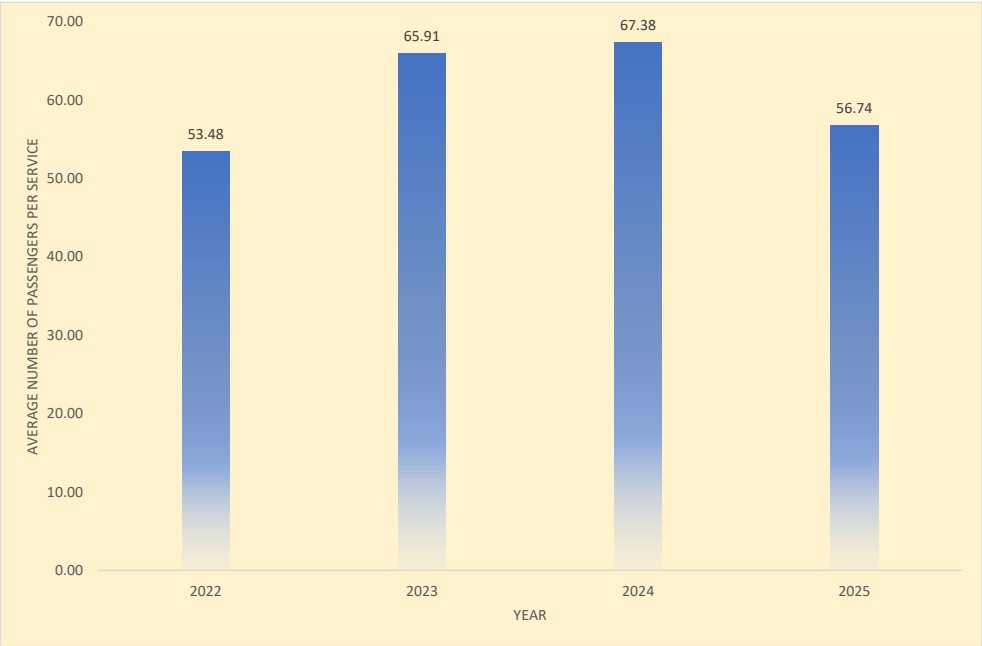


Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

The graph shows that 2023 and 2024 were the best years for the percentage of trains delivering lower greenhouse gas emissions than the equivalent car journey. The year 2024 was especially good because from February 2024 there were six extra return services per week, so the percentages in Figure 38 apply to a higher number of trains. The dip in 2025 reflects the decline in passenger numbers – resulting from the blocks of line - discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

It should be noted that the graph does not show by how many people were actually on each service. Figure 38 therefore provides the annual average number of passengers per service for 2022 to 2025 (no data is available for 2021). This shows that between 2023 and 2025 Te Huia was able to attract enough passengers to deliver a reduction in greenhouse gases compared to all trips going by car. The years 2023 and 2024 saw the 55 passenger threshold exceeded by around 20%, but in 2025 this had reduced to just 3%.

Figure 38: Average Number of Passengers per Service per Year



Source: Te Huia Ticket Data (Bee card and cash transactions)

6.9 Substitution of Car Trips

There is limited data on the extent to which trips made on Te Huia would have replaced those otherwise made by car. The Te Huia Customer Survey in 2025 revealed that 12% of respondents travelled on Te Huia because they did not have an alternative, which means that 88% could have chosen another mode instead. The same survey revealed that if Te Huia didn't exist, 53% of people could have driven a car; 30% been a passenger; and 39% used the coach. However, if Te Huia had not been available there is no guarantee that the trip would have been made by any of those modes.

Between April 2021 and December 2025, there have been 278,205 one-way passenger trips on Te Huia. If it is assumed that 53% of Te Huia passengers would have otherwise driven a car, we can estimate the number of these trips substituted - using an average vehicle occupancy of 1.4 - as being 105,320. Based on around four full years of services running, this equates to around 72 trips per day. Te Huia passenger trips are relatively long in distance (average 114 kilometres), the beneficial impact is higher than might be otherwise suggested by the trip numbers alone. Based on an average trip distance, total car vehicle kilometres substituted by travel on Te Huia is estimated at just over 12 million between April 2021 and December 2025.

Work undertaken on behalf of Council by MRCagney has used more ambitious car substitution assumptions based on the busiest day of the week[22]. On an average Thursday in 2024, 184 passengers travelled northbound towards Auckland on Te Huia. Assuming 8.5% of passengers would not have made this trip using another mode, this means there would have been 169 people in cars. Using a vehicle occupancy figure of 1.4 people per vehicle, they estimated that around 120 cars are taken off State Highway 1 between Hamilton and Auckland.

In the same piece of work, MRCagney noted that even what appears to be a relatively modest reduction in car traffic can have benefits. It is well-established that the relationship between traffic volumes (or density) and traffic speed is non-linear. When traffic is particularly dense and congested

[22] Benefits of Te Huia Rail Service, MRCagney, June 2025

– such as it is on the Auckland Southern motorway - any reduction in the number of vehicles has a disproportionately larger impact on congestion / travel time[23].

6.10 Conclusions

This chapter has provided an overview of various aspects of Te Huia's operational performance outside of the targets and investment objectives.

Operating revenues have increased year on year, most recently boosted by fare increases in 2024 and 2025. In contrast operating costs have risen and fallen depending on how many services have been operated, which has been impacted by both COVID-19 and more recent rail network blocks of line. The result is that service improvements – such as additional Thursday / Friday / Saturday trains and the new Sunday return journey – have been funded by an operational surplus rather than rate increases.

The whole issue of operational efficiency and subsidy is important and often misunderstood. Focussing only on one metric – subsidy per passenger – ignores the fact Te Huia has a very high average journey length (114 kilometres) which increases service benefits compared to shorter bus and train journeys.

It is a fact that every transport mode receives taxpayer subsidies in one form or another, and so only focussing on Te Huia glosses over the need for wider conversations around the right balance between user contributions, societal ability / willingness to invest, economic benefits and negative external impacts. To the credit of the current Government, this issue is recognised through their active consideration of time of use road user charging in congested networks. Motor vehicle users generally do not pay the full cost of external impacts they generate on:

- Other travellers through travelling in congested conditions.
- Noise, local air pollution and severance of local communities.
- Maintenance requirements for Road Controlling Authorities (RCAs).
- The environment through tailpipe emissions.

As is noted throughout this report, Te Huia's operating environment has often been very challenging in terms of delays to services – especially in 2023 – and repeated blocks of line from late 2024 and throughout 2025. The latter has impacted train services across the Auckland network, not only Te Huia. A recent analysis in the Greater Auckland blog suggests that Auckland Metro service passenger numbers have fallen back to levels prior to electrification of the network (which took place between 2014 and 2016)[24].

The commitment to health and safety is reflected in generally good performance – especially zero harm in relation to staff who are exposed to potential hazards every day in a way that passengers are not. The main challenge has been anti-social and sometimes criminal behaviour from a very small minority of passengers. A small number of notifiable events resulting from human factors should not detract from what has generally been a safe

As a diesel locomotive service, Te Huia does not benefit from electric trains and therefore has to generate decent numbers of passengers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared to people travelling by car. Since 2022, Te Huia has on average managed to exceed the environmental benefit threshold of 55 passengers per service, but better performance has understandably coincided with higher passenger numbers seen in 2024 especially.

There is evidence to suggest that Te Huia has provided an alternative for people who may otherwise use a car. Only a small minority of Te Huia passengers have not had a car available for their journey, which demonstrates that trains retain an ability to attract drivers in a way that other modes (such as

[23] Fundamental Speed-Flow-Density Relationships
[24] A metro rail timetable to match the infrastructure? - Greater Auckland

bus and coach) sometimes struggle with. This is partly because trains are perceived as a permanent service because of the exclusive track and station infrastructure they use. This dedicated right of way protects rail services from the impacts of traffic congestion, which significantly impacts buses and coaches where there are no on-road priority measures. Trains are also able to offer a premium (and sometimes even a better basic) product than buses.

7 Conclusions

This End of Trial Review and Evaluation Report has been produced for the purpose of assessing the extent to which Te Huia has achieved its targets and investment objectives, and therefore whether it should become a permanent service. The report has assessed a wide range of data – both directly relevant to the various business case targets and also in support of the wider story.

A key aim of the trial service was to establish proof of concept and demonstrate that trains could provide people with additional travel choice between Hamilton and Auckland. The previous trial had been short lived and foundered because of wider commercial imperatives for the operator at the time. In this respect Te Huia has been a success in that it has established itself as an important part of the Waikato public transport system. The service provides facilities to work productively that are not offered by the private car. Some people are now taking the train, rather than driving. There is an opportunity to build on the momentum which has been established and make Te Huia a go-to option which will help to manage future traffic growth and mitigate the damaging economic impacts of congestion. City Rail Link will transform travel within Auckland, and Te Huia will be able to feed people into that system and therefore complement the substantial investment which has been made.

There is little doubt that Te Huia has faced many challenges – from COVID-19 through to significant and ongoing disruption on the Auckland Metro rail network. These challenges have meant that building sustained momentum and hence higher levels of passenger demand has sometimes been a struggle. Fundamentally, reliable and punctual rail services have to be consistently available when people need them, and not just when it is operationally convenient or even possible. If a car owner was not able to use their vehicle for over 50 days in a year, they would get a new one. And yet in 2025, this was the situation that Te Huia passengers actually faced when blocks of line caused repeated periods when no trains could run. To be clear, there is no blame attached to any organisation involved in the provision and maintenance of the Auckland infrastructure – they have taken decisions in the best interests of the long-term future service provision and have been dealing with a legacy of under-investment which goes back many years.

So given all of the challenges, it is remarkable that Te Huia has demonstrated the level of positive progress that has been set out in this report. Meeting six of the eight targets – including the original business case passenger trip number forecasts - has been no mean feat. Punctuality and the passenger trip number stretch targets – the two that haven't been met – have been subject to rail network infrastructure performance challenges beyond Te Huia's control.

The generally positive performance against targets reflects on the excellent levels of commitment from KiwiRail as the service operator and Council as contract manager. The positive role of NZTA – both as co-investor and rail regulator – should also be acknowledged. The support from Territorial Authorities – particularly Hamilton City and Waikato District – has been consistent and very welcome. Others – such as Waipa District – can also see the benefits and have been strongly supportive.

Progress against investment objectives has been mixed. On the positive side there is clear evidence that Te Huia has increased accessibility to the interregional passenger transport network – with around one third of the region's population living within five kilometres of a station. Te Huia can also offer more reliable journey times compared to the private car in the morning peak hours, but travel is generally slower by train. However, Te Huia does offer a service where people can be productive whilst they travel. There is insufficient evidence to draw any firm conclusions as to the impact of Te Huia on wider economic indicators – specifically changes to building consents. More work through the Future Services Single Stage Business Case (SSBC) is considering the issue of wider economic benefits.

Te Huia is a much changed service from the two peak return trips every weekday from Hamilton to Papakura which commenced in April 2021. Direct city to city services – without the need for transfer

– have undoubtedly made the service more attractive. Council, KiwiRail and NZTA have worked closely to improve the timetable so that – for the same total level of investment – passengers have a significantly greater travel choice. Whilst Te Huia was originally conceived as a commuter service, the passenger base is a lot broader and encompasses increasingly important leisure travel market. There are many people in Auckland who make the point that Te Huia should offer them more attractive options for travel south into the Waikato, and that is a high priority for future timetable and service investment improvements. Further integration of Te Huia with Auckland Metro services is being explored by the Future Services SSBC.

The fact is that people who use Te Huia absolutely love it – as demonstrated by the consistently high levels of satisfaction which critics of the service could not possibly hope to match. Nevertheless, Council is very aware that further improvements to commercial operations of Te Huia are needed. An independent financial review in 2024 has resulted in two fare increases, and more will follow if Te Huia becomes a permanent service. Increasing the number of people who use the service – whilst maximising fare and third party revenue – remains a top priority. The positive moves towards increasing farebox recovery need to be sustained, but at the same time improvements to punctuality and availability will be demanded by passengers as a quid pro quo. There is more that can be done to develop a ticketing and pricing approach based on good yield management – for example offering discounted advance fares and special deals in addition to the walk-on full price option. The Huia load factors and hence revenue can be improved with a more sophisticated approach.

People also want faster and more frequent service across all seven days, and the planning work that Council is currently funding is moving things forward. However, for momentum to be sustained there has to be agreement from all parties that funding the permanent service – at broadly existing levels – is value for money.

On balance, therefore, the overall conclusion of this review and evaluation is that Te Huia has performed sufficiently well to be funded as a permanent service. If there is a positive funding decision from both Council and NZTA, then Te Huia would start on 01 July with the existing timetable. Council would then use conclusions from both the user / nonuser survey and the Future Services SSBC to consider possible timetable changes within the existing funding envelope as a means of optimising the existing investment.

6.6 PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPERATIONS REPORT

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Melissa Smith, Network Monitoring Analyst**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update to the committee on the performance of the public transport network and operational matters in 2025 Q4 (October to December).

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Patronage on the bus network has increased 1.38%, patronage on Te Huia has reduced by 7%, and patronage on FLEX is stable. Reliability and punctuality are good, though roadworks have had an impact, and some optimisation is possible for the FLEX On-Demand service.
3. Operational expenditure and private revenue to date puts the private share percentage at 16.70%, exceeding the target of 15.60%.
4. The bus driver safety campaign continues to make positive improvements to the network, with upgrades to bus stops and installation of driver toilets and rest stops. Engagement campaigns for bus and passenger rail encourage passengers to try taking the bus or Te Huia over the school breaks and summer holiday period. The first-ever BUSIT billboard was installed in Hamilton City on the corner of Tristram and Bryce Streets.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Public Transport Operations Report* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. This report covers general business, project updates, and network performance across the region, including bus services, FLEX On-Demand services, and Te Huia passenger rail services.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

Public Transport Operations Update

6. The bus driver safety campaign continues to progress in partnership with the territorial authorities and operators. Bus shelters within Hamilton City have been upgraded with better visibility. Driver toilet and rest facilities are being installed in Tokoroa and are expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2026.
7. Multiple urban and regional public transport services have been significantly impacted by major roadworks across Hamilton City. These works have created substantial network

challenges, affecting service reliability due to the closure of key road corridors throughout January 2026.

8. Several closures involved critical river-crossing connections, including Boundary Road Bridge and Anzac Parade. In addition, closures along River Road severely limited access across the Fairfield Bridge, with traffic reduced to a single lane, resulting in significant delays to many services. The PT Operations team has ensured bus diversions are in place for affected areas where road closures have been necessary.

9. Prior to January 2026, further disruption occurred in December during the annual Christmas Parade held along Anglesea Street, the city's main bus corridor. This event impacted numerous services, including high-frequency urban and regional routes. As a result, consideration has been raised regarding relocating future parades to Lake Road, utilising an alternative route around the lake to minimise disruption to the public transport network.

Customer Engagement and Marketing

Bus Promotions and Campaigns

10. Both the BUSIT and Te Huia channels are now brand partners with Hamilton & Waikato Tourism (H&WT).

11. With H&WT, both channels embarked on their first-ever User Generated Content (UCG) campaigns, using local creators with proven content creation experience and performance. The first reels were published recently on the H&WT (@WaikatoNZ) channels on Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok.

12. The *BUSIT to the Beach* campaign, which included digital, print, and bus back media, promoted bus services running to Raglan during the summer and holiday season. We collaborated with a young family to highlight the Raglan buses running all summer to the beach, also in partnership with HWT and our local Raglan stakeholders. This reel has been performing well across both Instagram (96 likes) and Tiktok (401). You can view this one Instagram here.

13. The first-ever BUSIT billboard was installed in Hamilton City on the corner of Tristram and Bryce Streets. It encourages car users who are looking for parking in the city to try the bus, reminding the public that our friendly bus drivers are always ready to welcome them onboard: "Ride easy with us."

14. Finally, public transport services have made it to the official **'Waikato Visitor Map'**. Both transport logos are front and centre next to the regional map layout, as well as QR codes to the relevant timetable information – and train logos in both Hamilton and Huntly locations. These maps are being printed and distributed across the region.

Te Huia Promotions and Campaigns

15. A page introducing Te Huia is now included on the H&WT website, encouraging the use of train for tourism trips to both Hamilton and Auckland.

16. The Te Huia reel has gathered over 450 likes on Instagram and 260 on TikTok in under 24 hours, with further expected in coming months. We will also be creating an ad with this video to target the Auckland audience to ride with Te Huia for a weekend away in the Waikato (going live after the Waitangi weekend BOL). View it on Instagram here.

17. Several campaigns aimed at improving passenger experience on Te Huia were successfully launched between October and December, including a colouring page for children travelling during school holidays, a festive "free cookie" when passengers purchase any hot drink from

the onboard café, and the installation of a wayfinding map at Frankton Station. The *Future of Te Huia* survey was launched in collaboration with the marketing/communication teams, and it garnered a large number of submissions and public attention.

Concession Management

18. WRC offers Corporate Concessions to several organisations. That will allow employees to receive subsidised fares through employer. Currently there are concession agreements with three organisations: AA Insurance, Genesis Energy and WRC.

19. AA Insurance Corporate Concession 6-month trial launched on 12 February 2025. Council is monitoring the uptake of concession holders and supporting the organisation with onboarding and education. AA Insurance has extended for two-year period up to January 2027.

20. Genesis Energy Limited has been a Corporate Concession provider since 11 May 2023. They requested to extend the term of the Agreement for a further period up to May 2027.

Passenger Experience Roadmap

21. Passenger Experience Roadmap implementation is on track and in line with outcomes agreed during review and refinement session in 2026.

22. Improvements launched to date include Content Management Platform integration for service alerts, digitalised timetables on the website, customer support model review, driver engagement and initiatives, and scoping for brand tender.

National Ticketing System (NTS)

23. NTS National Ticketing System transition date for Waikato region is not confirmed at the time of reporting. Council developed transition strategy, is working on retailer network and concession program transition.

Public Transport Network Performance

24. The full public transport operations dashboard is included as an appendix to this report.

Bus Performance

25. Patronage has increased compared to the same quarter last year, with 945,506 passengers counted. The majority of passengers are recorded on the high-frequency services: the Comet, the Orbiter, or the Meteor. Overall, patronage continues to grow but the rate of growth is slowing.

26. Reliability and punctuality have worsened somewhat compared to previous performance reports. Service arrivals vary between six and ten minutes, but most services are running on average up to five minutes early. There is room for improvement and optimisation. Roadworks have also had an impact on performance, particularly in Hamilton and Taupō, affecting the travel time reliability.

27. High-frequency services—the Comet, the Orbiter, and the Meteor—operate with high regularity with no more than one minute of excess waiting time and continue to experience the highest patronage across the network.

Passenger Rail Performance

28. Patronage has decreased compared to the same quarter last year, with 18,718 trips on Te Huia in this quarter. This is likely due to line closures over the October school holidays and

over the summer holidays. However, services continue to be punctual, with 83–89% of stations serviced within five minutes of the timetable.

FLEX On-Demand Performance

29. Patronage on the FLEX On-Demand service is more or less stable at 5,000 passengers each quarter. There is some room for optimisation as there continue to be trips not taken due to seat unavailability.

Financial (Private Share) Update

30. Through to the end of 2025 Q4, half of the financial year has elapsed. The private share target set by NZTA for this financial year is 15.60%.

31. As of the end of 2025 Q4 (i.e., December 2025), operating expenditure to date is $24,834,659 and private revenue to date is $4,147,288, which is primarily comprised of fare revenue. This represents a private share percentage of 16.70%, exceeding the target by approximately 1.10%.

32. This is a promising position. Staff continue to monitor financial performance through to the 2026/27 financial year.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

33. This report provided an update to the committee on the performance of the public transport network and operational matters in 2025 Q4 (October to December).

34. Operational expenditure and private revenue to date puts the private share percentage at 16.70%, exceeding the target of 15.60%.

35. Patronage on the bus network has increased 1.38%, patronage on Te Huia has reduced by 7%, and patronage on FLEX is stable. Reliability and punctuality are good, though roadworks have had an impact, and some optimisation is possible for the FLEX On-Demand service.

36. The bus driver safety campaign continues to make beneficial improvements to the network, with upgrades to bus stops and installation of driver toilets and rest stops. Engagement campaigns for bus and passenger rail encourage passengers to try taking the bus or Te Huia over the school breaks and summer holiday period. The first-ever BUSIT billboard was installed in Hamilton City on the corner of Tristram and Bryce Streets.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. OPERATIONAL MONITORING REPORT 2025 Q4 (Doc # 34374886) ⇩

Quarter:	**2025 Q4**	Date Range:	**1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025**

Operational Performance Monitoring Report

Commentary

Key Points

- Patronage has increased compared to the same quarter last year, with 945,506 passengers counted, with the majority of passengers catching the high-frequency services: the Comet, the Orbiter, or the Meteor. Overall, patronage continues to grow but the rate of growth is slowing.
- Reliability and punctuality have worsened somewhat compared to previous performance reports. Service arrivals vary between six and ten minutes, but most services are running on average up to five minutes fast. There is room for improvement and optimisation. Roadworks have also had an impact on performance, particularly in Hamilton and Taupō, and continue to be monitored.
- High-frequency services—the Comet, the Orbiter, and the Meteor—operate with high regularity with no more than one minute of excess waiting time and continue to experience the highest patronage across the network.

Patronage

Definition: How many trips are taken on public transportation?

- **Overall, patronage continues to grow, but the rate of growth is slowing.** There are 943,506 trips taken on public transportation during this quarter—a 1.38% increase compared to the same quarter last year. Patronage is reduced compared to the previous quarter (2025 Q3). This is expected due to reduced services operating during the holiday period at the end of December.
- **The majority of patronage is within Hamilton City and surrounding districts.** The majority of trips are taken within Hamilton City (Unit 1 and Unit 2), followed by the Waikato District (Unit 3 and Unit 5), Waipā District (Unit 6A), and Matamata-Piako/Hauraki Districts (Unit 4).
- **The largest passenger group is Adults (406,648), followed by Youth (162,741) and Senior (137,760) passengers.** This has not changed from previous reporting periods. The number of Adult passengers has decreased slightly compared to the same quarter last year, but the number of Senior and Accessibility passengers have grown. The size of the Youth and Child passenger groups is reported to have grown and shrunk significantly, respectively. This is because Youth as a category was introduced within the last year so a "like-to-like" comparison does not yet exist. Comparing the sum of Youth and Child passengers in this quarter (212,284) to the sum of Youth and Child passengers in the same quarter last year (219,459) reveals that the size of this group has overall remained stable.
- **High frequency services remain popular.** The most popular services remain the Orbiter (231,001), the Meteor (151,930), and the Comet (125,716). There is a slight decrease in patronage on the Orbiter and Comet (2–4%) and an increase in patronage on the Meteor (10%) compared to the same quarter last year. The next highest patroned services are the Northern Connector (43,798), followed by the Cambridge (36,155), and Te Awamutu (32,747). The most popular urban service is the Flagstaff service (28,154).
- **Coverage/infrequent services report low patronage.** The Connect-2-Taupō services collectively served 859 passengers, compared to 1,119 (a decrease of 23%) in the same quarter last year. Most Taupō services run at most twice per day up to three days per week. Likewise, the Te Kūiti Connector (2,170), Tokoroa Connector (2,084), and Tokoroa District service (836) report relatively low patronage with up to two return services daily. The exception

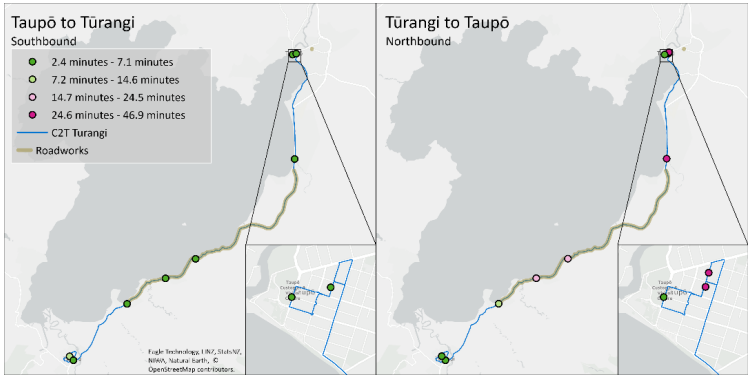
is the Tauwhare Pā and Tamahere/Matangi services, with six return services daily but a collective patronage of 1,696.

- **Patronage growth varies between different services.** The Cambridge, Eastern Connector, and Tokoroa District, and Tauwhare Pa services have seen a significant increase in patronage compared to the same quarter last year (between 12–50%). The Connect-2-Taupo services have likewise seen a significant decrease (between 20–25%), but given patronage is already low the absolute change in patronage is small. Remaining services have more or less steady patronage (changes between -10–10%).

Timetable Adherence

Definition: How many stops are serviced within the "on-time" window (-1/+5 minutes) of the timetable?

- **Most stops adhere to the timetable, but the average arrival time has increased.** Across the network, approximately two-thirds of stops are serviced within the "on-time" window with an average arrival time of one minute and thirty seconds after the scheduled arrival time. The mean arrival time has increased 18.26% (14 seconds) compared to the same quarter last year. Passengers are waiting longer on average, but the actual increase is marginal.
- **Most stops are serviced on average one minute late compared to the timetable.** The timetable adherence varies between 50–70% across all units. The mean arrival time is likewise one minute and thirty seconds, with the exception of Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4), whose services arrive two minutes early on average and Taupō (Unit 9), whose services arrive three minutes late on average. Pokeno-Pukekohe (Unit 3A) services have the distinction of arriving on average at the scheduled arrival time.
- **Variability is somewhat larger than ideal, and there is opportunity for improvement in waiting times.** Variability in arrival time ranges from three minutes to five minutes. This means that passengers generally have to arrive up to four minutes early and wait up to ten minutes to be confident that a bus will arrive. While not an overly large waiting time, there is opportunity for performance improvement.



- **Roadworks impacted arrival performance in Taupō.** The most adherent route is Tauwhare Pā service followed by the Dinsdale service. The least adherent route is the Connect-2-Taupō Turangi service followed by the Tokoroa District service. The Turangi service in particular reported an average arrival time of eleven minutes late compared to the timetable. This is likely due to Stop/Go restrictions in place along SH1 during November and December for roadworks. This is shown in the graphic below.

Runtime Adherence

Definition: How many trips are completed within five minutes (-5/+5 minutes) of the timetabled runtime?

- **Most services run within five minutes of the scheduled runtime.** Approximately 75% of all services run within a five-minute window of the scheduled runtime, with services running two and a half minutes early on

average—a slight 4.45% increase (7 seconds) compared to the same quarter last year.

- **Services are running fast on average except in Waipā and South Waikato where services are running slow.** Runtime adherence is between 50–80% for all units, with urban services having greater adherence than regional services. On average, all units run between 2–4 minutes early except for Taupō (Unit 9) which runs one minute late on average and South Waikato (Unit 7) which runs two minutes late on average. Variation in runtime adherence ranges between 3–6 minutes. In Waipā (Unit 6A) and South Waikato (Unit 7), the variation in runtime is more than six minutes. This means that there is a wide window of runtimes across services, with most services running fast. This may be due to the start of school holidays leading to fewer boardings during peak time.
- **Roadworks impacted runtime performance in Taupō.** The most adherent route is Tauwhare Pā, followed by Tamahere/Matangi and Fitzroy. Approximately 95% of these services arrive within five minutes of the timetabled runtime. The least adherent route is Connect-2-Taupō Turangi, running six minutes late on average (likely for the reasons discussed in the previous section), followed by Flagstaff North, running eight minutes early on average.
- **Regional services continue to experience large variation in runtimes.** The largest variation of runtime is reported by the Te Kūiti Connector, with seven out of ten services running between five minutes fast and fifteen minutes slow. Other regional services, such as the Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch service, Tokoroa Connector service, Cambridge service, and Te Awamutu services report similar results. This is likely due to extended travel on regional roads which introduces variation in overall travel time.

Excess Waiting Time

Definition: For high frequency services, how much longer than the scheduled headway do passengers need to wait for a service?

- **Excess waiting time is low.** The excess waiting time for all services is less than half a minute. This a 51.51% improvement compared to the same quarter last year.
- **Services are regular and arrive every 15–20 minutes on average during peak times and 20–40 minutes on average during off-peak times.** As expected, excess waiting time is higher during on-peak services compared to off-peak services. However, excess waiting time is less than two minutes from the scheduled headway, which indicates high regularity.

Missed Stops

Definition: How many and which bus stops have missing data?

- **Roadworks and bus diversions have reduced the availability of data.** Between 4–5% of stops across the network have missing data. This is higher than expected but still within a reasonable range and likely due to summer roadworks necessitating bus detours.
- **Regional services continue to report higher than ideal proportions of missing data.** Bus stops serviced by Taupō (Unit 9) and South Waikato (Unit 7) services are missing 8–10% of data. While this is more than what is ideal, this is expected and reasonable given that these services primarily operate regionally where there is reduced signal connectivity.
- **Road closures in Mangakino and South Waikato have impacted data availability.** The stops with the highest proportion of missing data are located in the Taupō, Mangakino, and Tokoroa townships, with some stops having no data recorded at all during the reporting period. Poor signal connectivity likely contributes to this. Roadworks also contribute, with road closures in Mangakino in particularly necessitating bus detours.

Te Huia

- **Patronage has decreased compared to the same quarter last year.** There are 18,718 trips on Te Huia in this quarter. This is a reduction compared to the same quarter last year (20,089) but an increase compared to the July-September quarter (17,138). This is likely due to line closures over the October school holidays and over the summer holidays.
- **Services continue to be punctual.** Approximately 83–89% of stations are serviced within five minutes of the timetable, and more than 97% of stations are serviced within fifteen minutes. There is no significant change in reliability compared to previous quarters. This is reasonably reliable.

Flex On-Demand

- **Patronage on the FLEX On-Demand service is stable.** The FLEX On-Demand service carried 4,999 passengers in 2025 Q4—a 0.66% decrease compared to the same quarter last year, indicating more or less stable patronage. Most passengers are transported between 11pm and midnight.
- **Many trips are not taken due to waiting times and seat availability, indicating significant room for improvement and optimisation.** There are 1,178 trip proposals not accepted by users, affecting 2,546 passengers. This may be due to proposed waiting times or change of heart. In addition, 451 trip requests are rejected due to unavailability of seats. This impacted 1,452 passengers. This indicates opportunity for optimisation to improve availability of the service for passengers.

REGIONAL TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

Operational Performance Monitoring Report

For the period: 2025 Q4

1 October 2025 to 31 December 2025

BUSIT

Te Huia
Connecting Waikato & Auckland

flex
BUSIT ON DEMAND

Waikato
REGIONAL COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Waikato

1 Patronage

2025 Q4

Definition: *How many trips are taken on public transportation?*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

943,506
Patronage (#)

▲ 1.38%
Patronage Change (%)

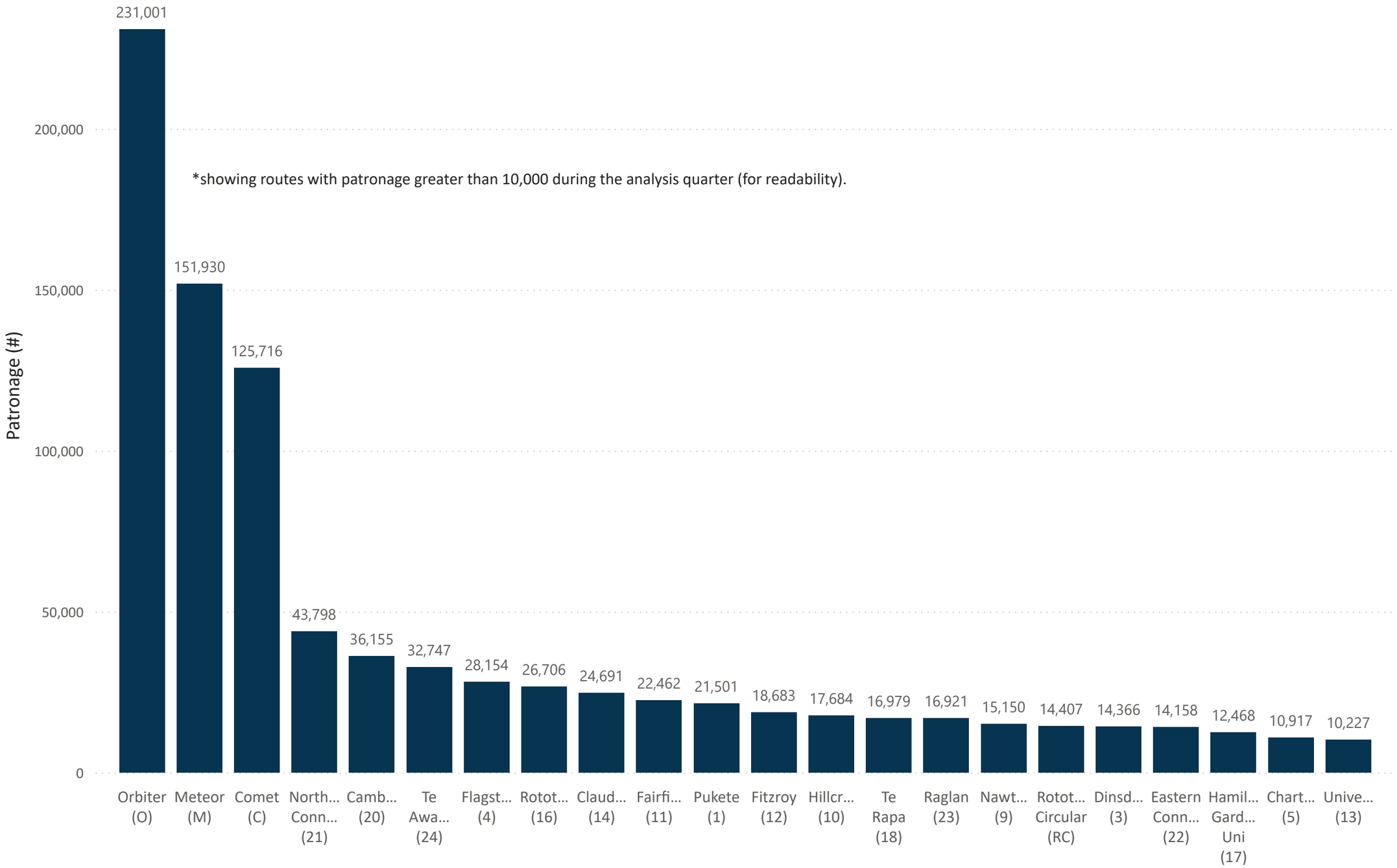
Unit	Patronage (#)	Change (%)
Hamilton East (Unit 2)	404,176	-0.25%
Hamilton West (Unit 1)	373,453	2.48%
Waipa (Unit 6A)	68,902	7.53%
Huntly (Unit 3)	43,798	-0.96%
Raglan (Unit 5)	16,921	-8.44%
Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4)	14,158	12.50%
Pokeno - Pukekohe (Unit 3A)	9,508	9.30%
South Waikato (Unit 7)	7,549	-0.03%
Taupo (Unit 9)	5,041	-7.96%

Ticket Group	Patronage (#)	Change (%)
Adult	406,648	-4.64%
Youth	162,741	447.77%
Senior	137,760	6.92%
Accessibility	107,612	9.71%
Tertiary	78,178	36.52%
Child	49,543	-73.89%
Other	1,024	67.59%

***Note:** Te Huia, Thames Connector (70) and Taumarunui Hospital Service (25) are excluded. Te Huia is reported elsewhere and Thames Connector/Taumarunui Hospital Service do not have standard ticketing machines and are reported elsewhere.*

1 Patronage - by Route

2025 Q4



*showing routes with patronage greater than 10,000 during the analysis quarter (for readability).

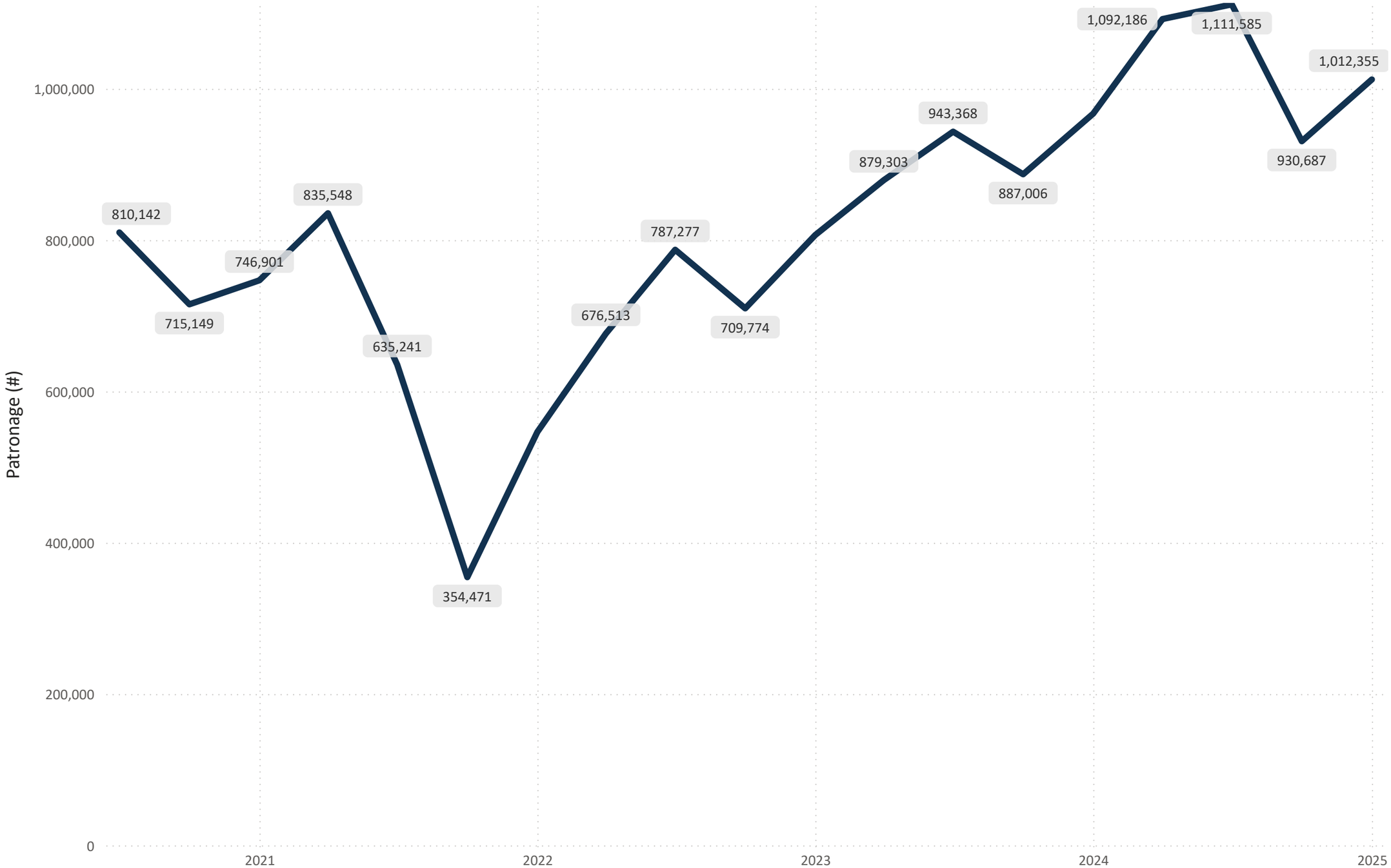
1 Patronage - by Route

2025 Q4

Route	Patronage (#)	Change (%)
Orbiter (O)	231,001	-2.80%
Meteor (M)	151,930	9.84%
Comet (C)	125,716	-4.07%
Northern Connector (21)	43,798	-0.96%
Cambridge (20)	36,155	12.21%
Te Awamutu (24)	32,747	2.80%
Flagstaff (4)	28,154	1.91%
Rototuna (16)	26,706	0.64%
Claudelands (14)	24,691	-2.99%
Fairfield (11)	22,462	7.75%
Pukete (1)	21,501	8.70%
Fitzroy (12)	18,683	4.70%
Hillcrest (10)	17,684	2.70%
Te Rapa (18)	16,979	-9.32%
Raglan (23)	16,921	-8.44%
Nawton (9)	15,150	1.77%
Rototuna Circular (RC)	14,407	8.27%
Dinsdale (3)	14,366	-0.92%
Eastern Connector (22)	14,158	12.50%
Hamilton Gardens Uni (17)	12,468	8.58%
Chartwell (5)	10,917	9.33%
University (13)	10,227	5.27%
Pokeno - Pukekohe (44)	9,508	9.30%
Bremworth / Templeview (19)	7,432	-3.25%
Flagstaff North (4N)	5,459	1.58%
Taupo Connector (33)	4,182	-4.04%
Tokoroa Circuit (30)	2,459	-10.55%
Te Kuiti Connector (26)	2,170	5.75%
Tokoroa Connector (32)	2,084	-5.14%
Tamahere/Matangi (28)	1,049	-7.41%
Tokoroa District (31)	836	51.18%
Tauwhare Pa (27)	647	32.58%
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa (37)	344	-25.38%
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi (36)	339	-19.86%
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei (38)	137	-26.74%
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay (34)	39	-18.75%

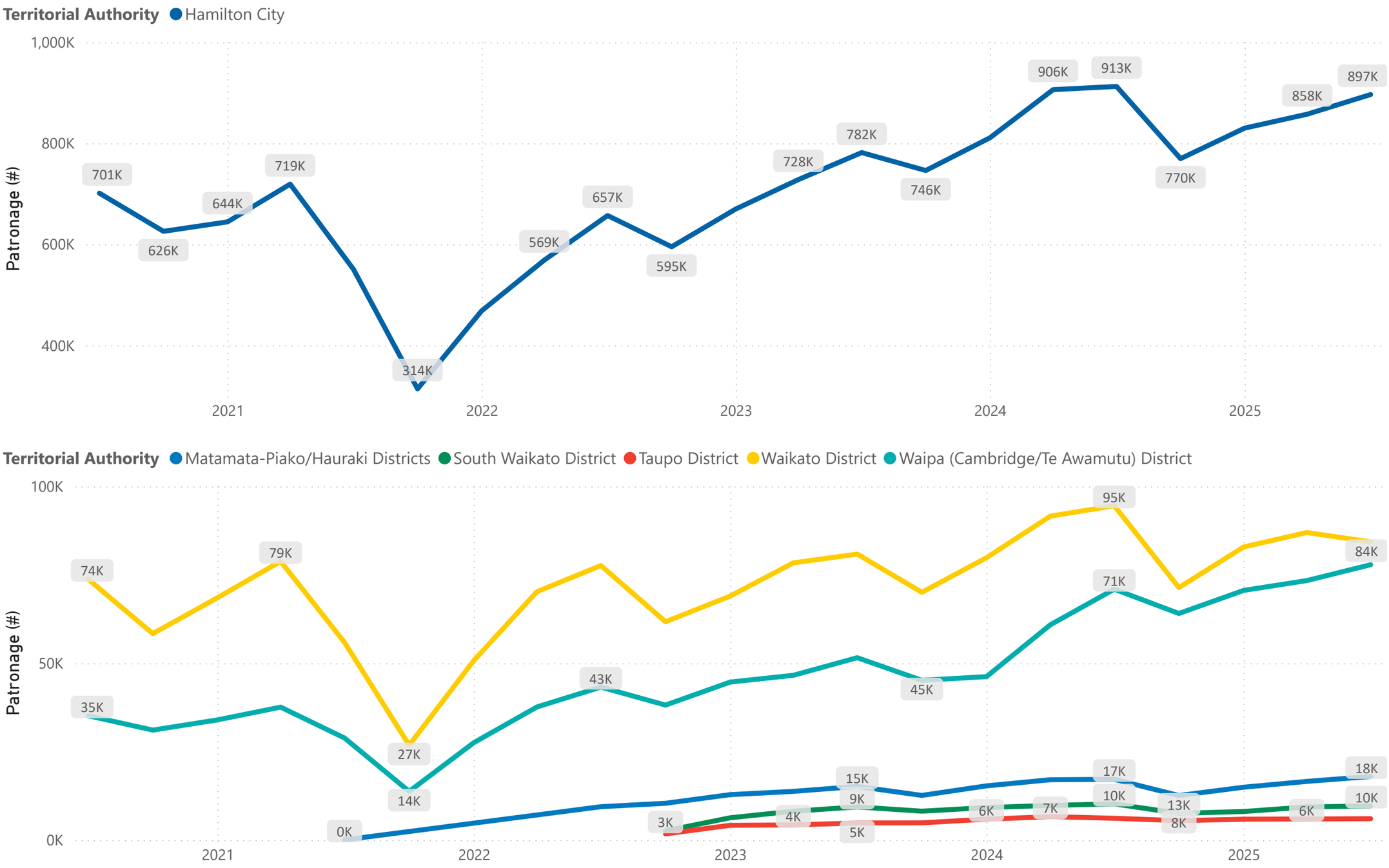
1 Patronage - by Quarter

2025 Q4



1 Patronage - by Quarter/Territorial Authority

2025 Q4



2 Timetable Adherence

2025 Q4

Definition: *How many stops are serviced within the "on-time" window (-1/+5 minutes) of the timetable?*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

67.51%
Overall Timetable Adherence (%)

1 min 30 secs
Overall Mean Timetable Adherence (mins)

▲18.26%
Mean Timetable Adherence Change (%)

Unit	Timetable Adherence (%) ▼	Mean Timetable Adherence	Standard Deviation of Timetable Adherence
Hamilton East (Unit 2)	71.24%	1 min 48 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Waipa (Unit 6A)	67.75%	1 min 24 secs	3 mins 12 secs
Hamilton West (Unit 1)	66.61%	1 min 12 secs	3 mins 18 secs
Huntly (Unit 3)	59.53%	1 min 30 secs	4 mins 0 secs
Raglan (Unit 5)	53.96%	1 min 0 secs	4 mins 6 secs
Pokeno - Pukekohe (Unit 3A)	52.13%	0 mins 6 secs	3 mins 24 secs
South Waikato (Unit 7)	51.68%	1 min 42 secs	4 mins 36 secs
Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4)	50.44%	-1 mins 54 secs	3 mins 42 secs
Taupo (Unit 9)	44.38%	2 mins 54 secs	5 mins 6 secs

2 Timetable Adherence - by Route

2025 Q4

Route	Timetable Adherence (%)	Mean Timetable Adherence	Standard Deviation of Timetable Adherence
Tauwhare Pa (27)	81.87%	1 min 48 secs	2 mins 48 secs
Dinsdale (3)	81.79%	1 min 12 secs	2 mins 12 secs
Bremworth / Templeview (19)	80.87%	1 min 0 secs	2 mins 6 secs
Fitzroy (12)	80.53%	1 min 48 secs	2 mins 24 secs
Hamilton Gardens Uni (17)	80.01%	1 min 12 secs	2 mins 18 secs
Tamahere/Matangi (28)	79.64%	1 min 12 secs	2 mins 36 secs
Fairfield (11)	78.14%	2 mins 30 secs	2 mins 60 secs
University (13)	77.99%	0 mins 36 secs	2 mins 6 secs
Flagstaff (4)	74.89%	1 min 48 secs	3 mins 6 secs
Nawton (9)	74.22%	1 min 60 secs	3 mins 6 secs
Te Rapa (18)	72.34%	1 min 42 secs	2 mins 60 secs
Claudelands (14)	72.20%	1 min 0 secs	2 mins 48 secs
Chartwell (5)	70.95%	1 min 24 secs	3 mins 18 secs
Rototuna (16)	70.87%	2 mins 12 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Orbiter (O)	69.19%	2 mins 0 secs	3 mins 42 secs
Cambridge (20)	69.14%	0 mins 48 secs	2 mins 54 secs
Hillcrest (10)	67.99%	-1 mins 54 secs	2 mins 36 secs
Pukete (1)	66.39%	0 mins 48 secs	3 mins 12 secs
Te Awamutu (24)	65.87%	2 mins 6 secs	3 mins 18 secs
Rototuna Circular (RC)	64.24%	2 mins 24 secs	4 mins 18 secs
Tokoroa Connector (32)	62.82%	1 min 48 secs	3 mins 60 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei (38)	62.69%	-1 mins 54 secs	1 min 54 secs
Meteor (M)	61.52%	1 min 0 secs	3 mins 24 secs
Comet (C)	59.74%	1 min 0 secs	3 mins 60 secs
Northern Connector (21)	59.53%	1 min 30 secs	4 mins 0 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay (34)	56.73%	-3 mins 48 secs	8 mins 24 secs
Raglan (23)	53.96%	1 min 0 secs	4 mins 6 secs
Pokeno - Pukekohe (44)	52.13%	0 mins 6 secs	3 mins 24 secs
Tokoroa Circuit (30)	50.96%	0 mins 54 secs	3 mins 54 secs
Eastern Connector (22)	50.44%	-1 mins 54 secs	3 mins 42 secs
Te Kuiti Connector (26)	48.36%	4 mins 36 secs	5 mins 48 secs
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa (37)	46.72%	1 min 12 secs	3 mins 12 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch (35)	44.64%	1 min 42 secs	8 mins 30 secs
Taupo Connector (33)	43.81%	3 mins 0 secs	4 mins 42 secs
Flagstaff North (4N)	42.53%	-2 mins 36 secs	5 mins 6 secs
Tokoroa District (31)	39.21%	-2 mins 42 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi (36)	23.21%	11 mins 48 secs	13 mins 36 secs

3 Runtime Adherence

2025 Q4

Definition: *How many trips are completed within five minutes (-5/+5 minutes) of the timetabled runtime?*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

76.47%
Overall Runtime Adherence (%)

-2 mins 42 secs
Overall Mean Runtime Adherence (mins)

▲ 4.45%
Mean Runtime Adherence Change (%)

Unit	Runtime Adherence (%) ▼	Mean Runtime Adherence	Standard Deviation of Runtime Adherence
Hamilton West (Unit 1)	81.59%	-2 mins 54 secs	3 mins 36 secs
Hamilton East (Unit 2)	76.04%	-2 mins 30 secs	4 mins 6 secs
Raglan (Unit 5)	75.23%	-2 mins 18 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Pokeno - Pukekohe (Unit 3A)	71.36%	-3 mins 48 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Huntly (Unit 3)	65.51%	-3 mins 48 secs	4 mins 30 secs
Taupo (Unit 9)	65.35%	0 mins 54 secs	4 mins 36 secs
Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4)	65.29%	-3 mins 42 secs	4 mins 24 secs
Waipa (Unit 6A)	64.98%	-2 mins 24 secs	6 mins 18 secs
South Waikato (Unit 7)	53.91%	2 mins 6 secs	6 mins 12 secs

3 Runtime Adherence - by Route

2025 Q4

Route	Runtime Adherence (%)	Mean Runtime Adherence	Standard Deviation of Runtime Adherence
Tauwhare Pa (27)	94.58%	-1 mins 60 secs	1 min 48 secs
Tamahere/Matangi (28)	94.17%	-1 mins 54 secs	2 mins 6 secs
Fitzroy (12)	89.74%	-2 mins 60 secs	2 mins 30 secs
Bremworth / Templeview (19)	88.77%	-2 mins 6 secs	2 mins 0 secs
Dinsdale (3)	87.61%	-3 mins 54 secs	2 mins 12 secs
Hamilton Gardens Uni (17)	87.57%	-1 mins 12 secs	2 mins 42 secs
Nawton (9)	86.87%	-2 mins 30 secs	3 mins 6 secs
Chartwell (5)	86.39%	-1 mins 6 secs	3 mins 12 secs
University (13)	84.95%	-3 mins 30 secs	2 mins 12 secs
Claudelands (14)	84.53%	-1 mins 48 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Fairfield (11)	83.72%	0 mins 48 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Pukete (1)	82.51%	-1 mins 36 secs	3 mins 12 secs
Comet (C)	79.19%	-1 mins 6 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Te Rapa (18)	78.94%	-2 mins 18 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Rototuna (16)	78.05%	-2 mins 54 secs	3 mins 54 secs
Flagstaff (4)	77.82%	-2 mins 36 secs	3 mins 42 secs
Rototuna Circular (RC)	76.28%	-2 mins 36 secs	4 mins 24 secs
Taupo Connector (33)	75.75%	1 min 36 secs	4 mins 18 secs
Raglan (23)	75.23%	-2 mins 18 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Tokoroa District (31)	75.00%	-3 mins 24 secs	2 mins 54 secs
Meteor (M)	73.79%	-1 mins 6 secs	4 mins 36 secs
Pokeno - Pukekohe (44)	71.36%	-3 mins 48 secs	3 mins 30 secs
Orbiter (O)	71.06%	-2 mins 18 secs	4 mins 36 secs
Te Awamutu (24)	65.51%	-2 mins 42 secs	6 mins 18 secs
Northern Connector (21)	65.51%	-3 mins 48 secs	4 mins 30 secs
Eastern Connector (22)	65.29%	-3 mins 42 secs	4 mins 24 secs
Cambridge (20)	64.43%	-2 mins 6 secs	6 mins 18 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei (38)	62.08%	-2 mins 6 secs	2 mins 0 secs
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa (37)	60.42%	-1 mins 42 secs	3 mins 48 secs
Tokoroa Connector (32)	51.67%	-1 mins 12 secs	6 mins 48 secs
Hillcrest (10)	51.37%	-5 mins 18 secs	2 mins 48 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay (34)	47.22%	-3 mins 54 secs	3 mins 54 secs
Tokoroa Circuit (30)	46.56%	5 mins 18 secs	3 mins 18 secs
Te Kuiti Connector (26)	35.00%	4 mins 48 secs	9 mins 18 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch (35)	25.00%	-6 mins 30 secs	7 mins 24 secs
Flagstaff North (4N)	19.90%	-8 mins 24 secs	5 mins 18 secs
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi (36)	17.39%	6 mins 60 secs	5 mins 12 secs

4 Excess Waiting Time

2025 Q4

Definition: *For high frequency services, how much longer than the scheduled headway do passengers need to wait for a service?*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

0 mins 18 secs
Overall Excess Waiting Time

▼-51.51%
Excess Waiting Time Change (%)

Route	Time of Day	Scheduled Waiting Time	Excess Waiting Time ▲	Level of Service Description
Orbiter (O)	Off-Peak	22 mins 54 secs	0 mins 12 secs	Service provided like clockwork
Comet (C)	On-Peak	10 mins 24 secs	0 mins 36 secs	Vehicles slightly off headway
Meteor (M)	On-Peak	8 mins 18 secs	0 mins 36 secs	Vehicles slightly off headway
Orbiter (O)	On-Peak	7 mins 30 secs	0 mins 42 secs	Vehicles slightly off headway
Comet (C)	Off-Peak	36 mins 0 secs	-1 mins 54 secs	Service provided like clockwork
Meteor (M)	Off-Peak	28 mins 6 secs	-1 mins 60 secs	Service provided like clockwork

***Note:** "On-Peak" services are defined as services running between 7am and 6pm during the week (i.e., excluding weekends and public holidays).*

5 Missed Stops

Definition: *How many and which bus stops have missing data?*

Data may be missing due to equipment/GPS failure, road works, or poor signal.

2025 Q4

3,223,938	150,230	4.66%
Sum of StopsServiced	Sum of StopsMissed	Sum of MissedPercentage

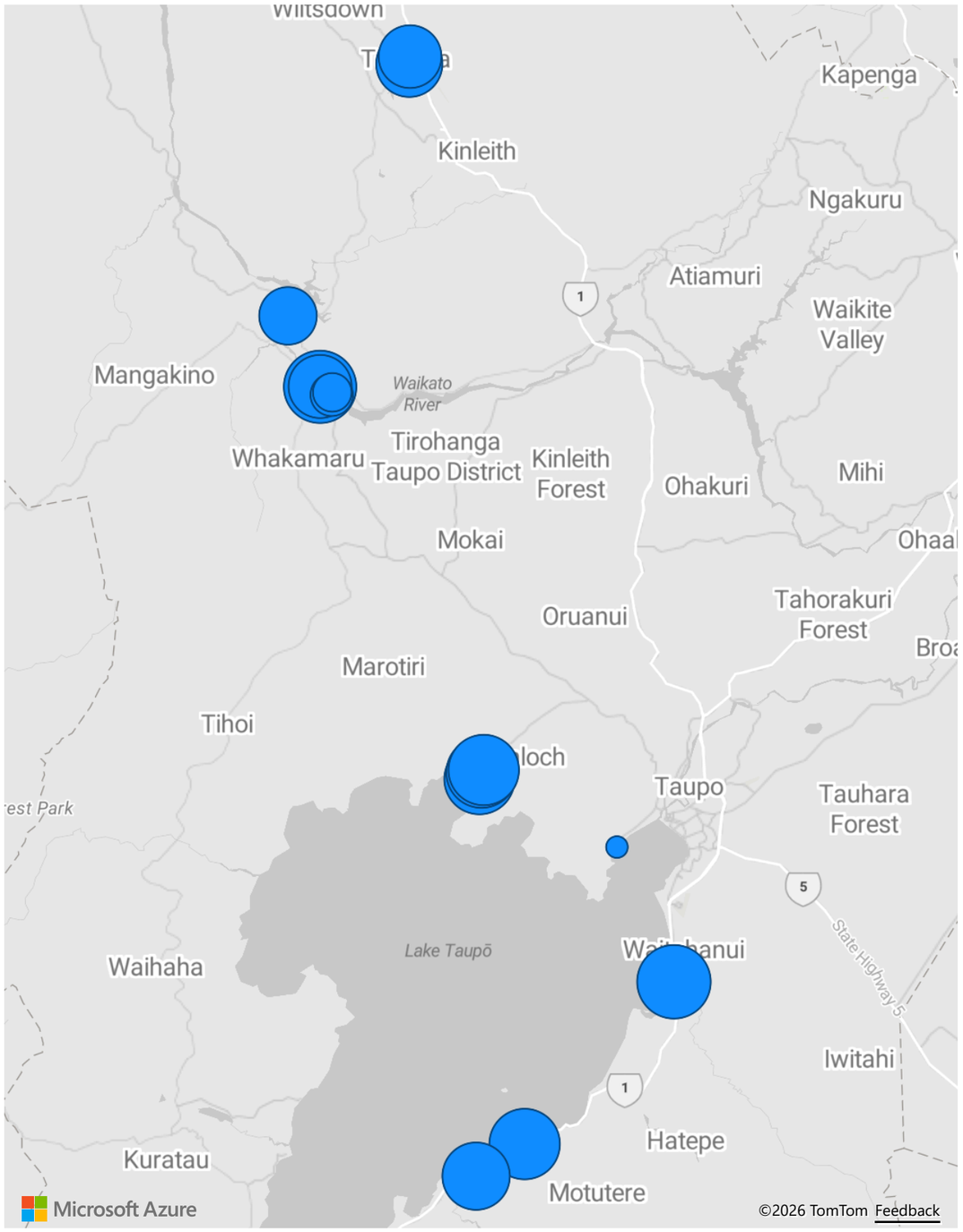
UnitLabel	Missed Stops (#)	Missed Stops (%)
South Waikato (Unit 7)	1,858	10.07%
Taupo (Unit 9)	4,121	8.40%
Waipa (Unit 6A)	14,979	7.92%
Pokeno - Pukekohe (Unit 3A)	3,463	7.46%
Raglan (Unit 5)	1,405	4.79%
Hamilton West (Unit 1)	63,100	4.79%
Morrinsville/Paeroa (Unit 4)	1,427	4.50%
Huntly (Unit 3)	5,345	4.13%
Hamilton East (Unit 2)	54,532	3.86%

***Note:** Missing bus stops are already excluded from previous calculations.*

5 Missed Stops - by Stop (Top 14)

2025 Q4

StopName	Missed Stops (%)
Waitahanui, Five Mile Bay-Waitahanui (opp Te Kura O Waitahanui)	89.13%
Tihoi Rd, Whakamaru (Whakamaru Store)	87.50%
Motutere Bay, Motutere (opp Holiday Park)	84.78%
53 Marina Tce, Kinloch	84.62%
Kinloch Rd, Kinloch (opp Seagers Cl)	84.62%
Kinloch Rd, Kinloch (outside Community Booth)	84.62%
Waitetoko, Oruatua-Te-Rangiita-Waitetoko (opp Marae)	80.43%
Bridge St, Tokoroa (New World)	78.87%
Whakamaru Store, Whakamaru (Northbound) (hail2ride)	75.00%
Chambers St, Tokoroa (Tokoroa Club)	74.60%
Rangatira Dr, Mangakino (near Kowhai St) (hail2ride)	68.75%
39 Mountview Cl, Whakamaru (hail2ride)	56.25%
Whakamaru Village, Whakamaru	54.17%
Opp 11 Beasley Pl, Acacia Bay	50.00%



5 Missed Stops - by Route

2025 Q4

Route	Missed Stops (#)	Missed Stops (%)
Connect-2-Taupo Turangi (36)	253	32.44%
Connect-2-Taupo Kinloch (35)	101	30.06%
Connect2Taupo - Mangakino/Tokoroa (37)	642	28.48%
Tokoroa Circuit (30)	1,535	14.50%
Te Awamutu (24)	9,726	12.12%
Connect-2-Taupo Acacia Bay (34)	93	11.80%
Connect-2-Taupo Wairakei (38)	130	9.07%
Tokoroa District (31)	105	8.33%
Pokeno - Pukekohe (44)	3,463	7.46%
Te Rapa (18)	6,052	7.00%
Taupo Connector (33)	2,902	6.68%
Pukete (1)	6,421	5.35%
Nawton (9)	4,448	5.22%
Comet (C)	16,442	4.86%
Cambridge (20)	5,253	4.82%
Raglan (23)	1,405	4.79%
Bremworth / Templeview (19)	2,668	4.73%
Hillcrest (10)	3,015	4.64%
Chartwell (5)	2,865	4.59%
Eastern Connector (22)	1,427	4.50%
Meteor (M)	19,735	4.42%
Flagstaff (4)	5,084	4.39%
Dinsdale (3)	3,251	4.20%
Rototuna (16)	4,073	4.15%
Northern Connector (21)	5,345	4.13%
Claudelands (14)	3,827	4.12%
Fitzroy (12)	3,201	3.83%
Fairfield (11)	4,210	3.80%
Te Kuiti Connector (26)	131	3.76%
Rototuna Circular (RC)	2,968	3.74%
Flagstaff North (4N)	243	3.73%
Tamahere/Matangi (28)	652	3.70%
Orbiter (O)	23,476	3.62%
University (13)	1,877	3.61%
Hamilton Gardens Uni (17)	2,894	3.57%
Tauwhare Pa (27)	230	3.55%
Tokoroa Connector (32)	87	2.79%

6 FLEX - Patronage and Status

2025 Q4

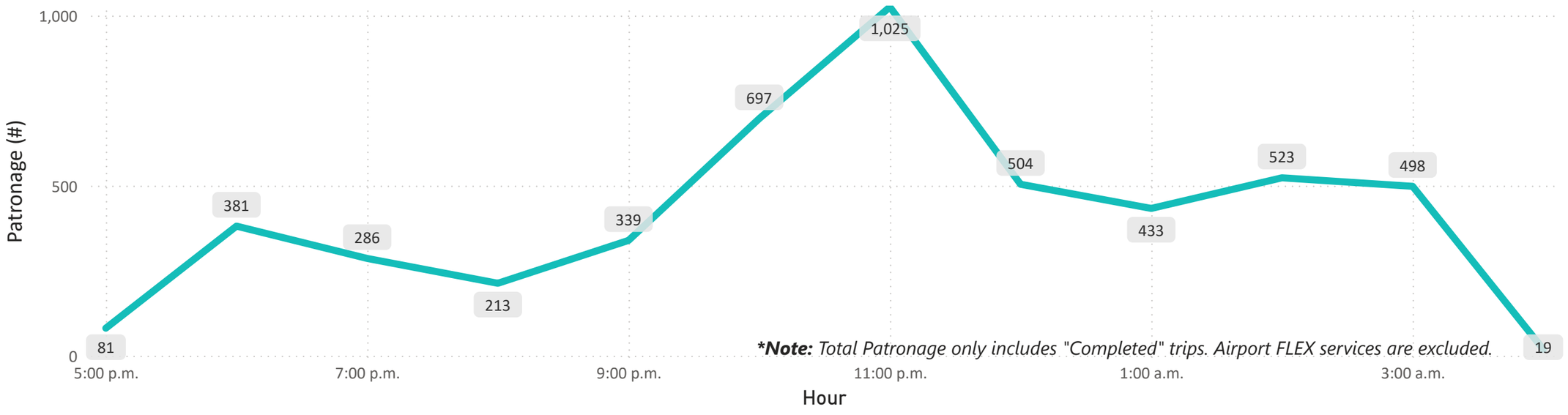
Definition: *The number of trips requested and completed for the weekend on-demand FLEX service.*

*Compared to the same quarter last year.

4,999
Patronage (#)

▼ -0.66%
Patronage Change (%)

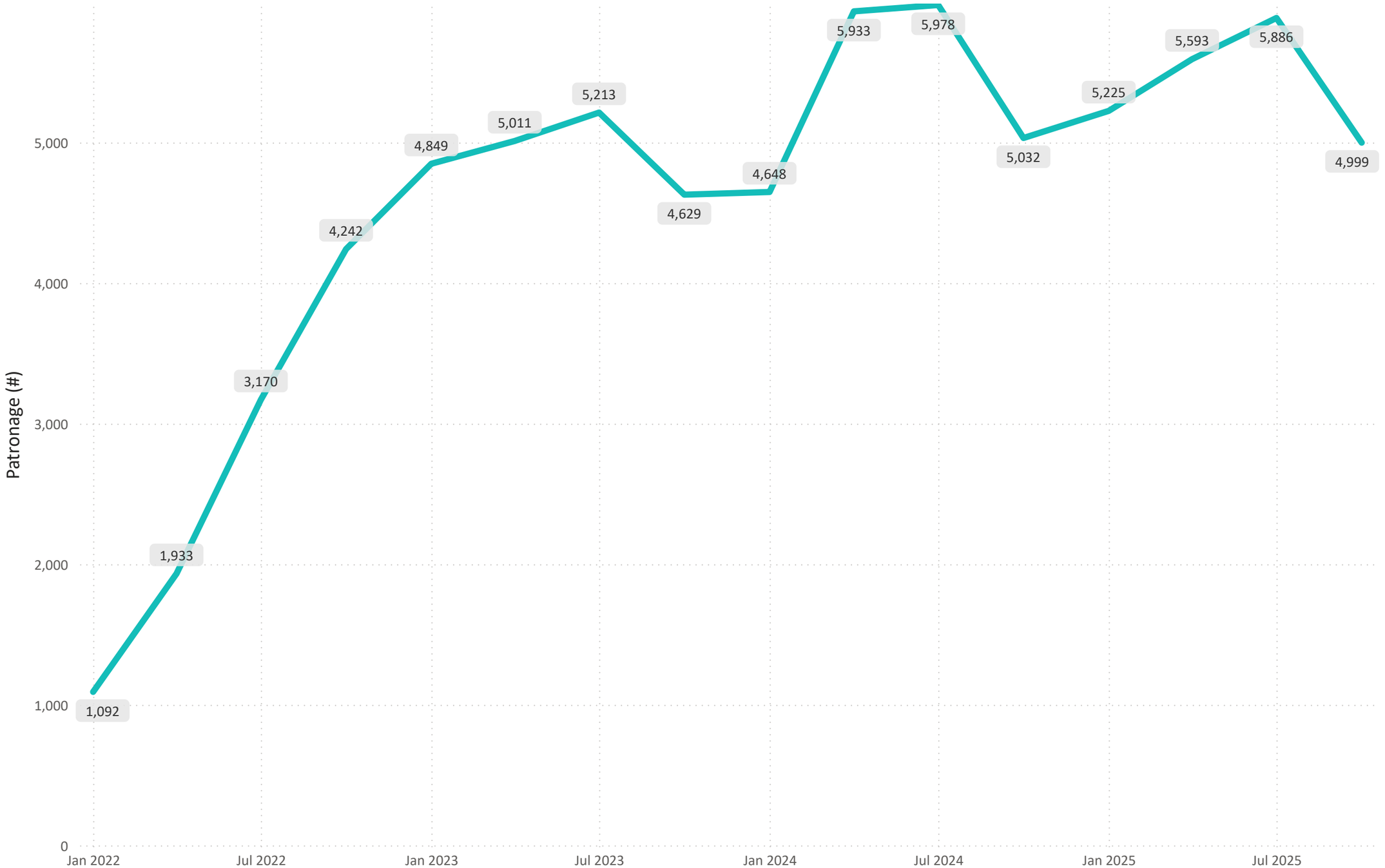
Status of Requests	Requests (#)	Patronage (#)
Completed	2,118	4,999
Unaccepted Proposal	1,178	2,546
Seat Unavailable	451	1,452
Cancel	263	607
Invalid or Other Error	78	255
No Show	46	120



***Note:** Total Patronage only includes "Completed" trips. Airport FLEX services are excluded.*

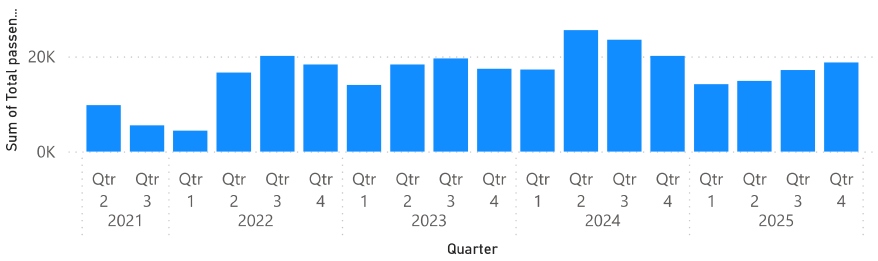
6 FLEX - Patronage by Quarter

2025 Q4

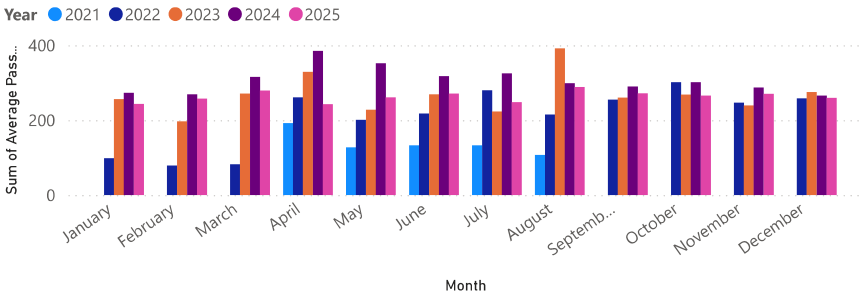


Te Huia performance in Q4 2025

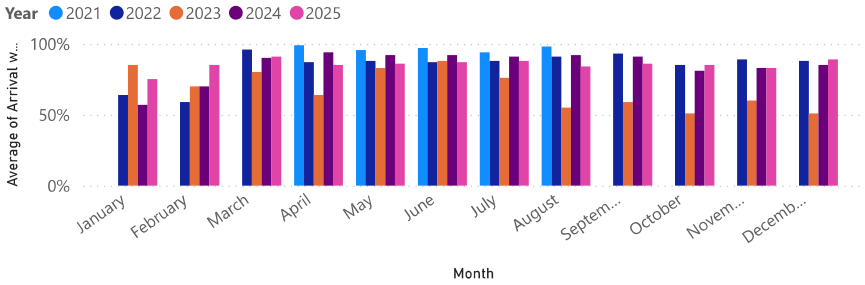
Quarterly patronage



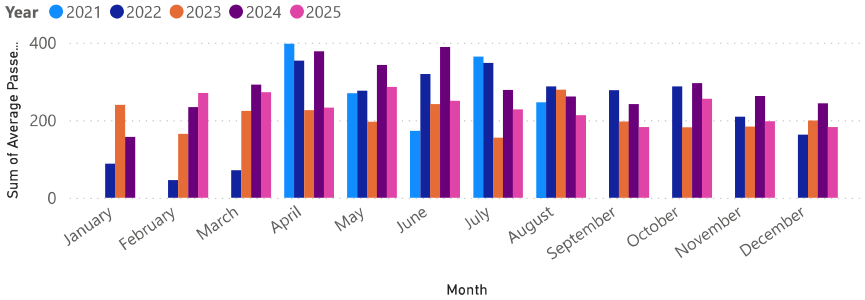
Average Passengers per day: Mon-Fri



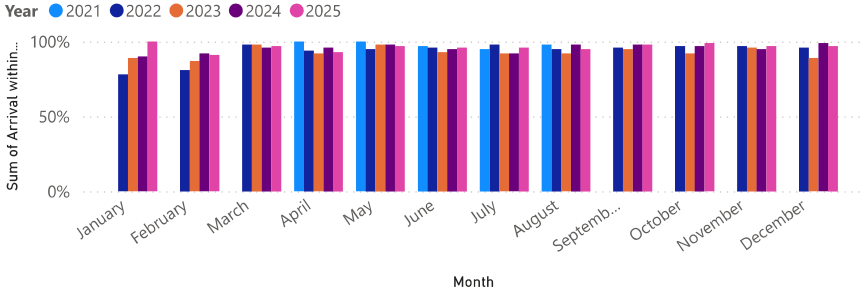
Percentage of Arrival within 5 minutes of schedule



Average Passengers per day: Sat



Percentage of Arrival within 15 minutes of schedule



6.7 PUBLIC TRANSPORT ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Rā | Date: **23 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Katherine Simpson, Public Transport Planner**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To facilitate a discussion with elected members on public transport issues and opportunities within each district, informed by pre-meeting engagement between members and their respective staff representatives on the Regional Advisory Group (RAG).
2. The session aims to collate a consolidated list of local priorities for the Subcommittee's consideration.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. This report introduces a round-table discussion intended to gather insights from elected members on public transport challenges and opportunities across the region. Each member has been invited to consider local priorities in advance, in collaboration with their RAG representative.
4. The purpose of the discussion is to surface key themes, emerging needs, and potential areas for improvement or investment.
5. The discussion will be phased to ensure all matters can be considered. First, regional and rural topics by district will be discussed. There will then a focussed discussion about urban topics led by Hamilton City Council.
6. The outcomes of this session will support greater regional visibility of local issues and assist staff in ongoing planning, coordination, and delivery of public transport network operations.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Public Transport Issues and Opportunities* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.8 PUBLIC TRANSPORT BRANDING REFRESH

Rā | Date: **27 February 2026**

Kaituhi | Author: **Sandra Sesto-Dekic, Team Leader - Customer Focus**

Kaituku | Authoriser: **Phil King, Director, Regional Transport Connections**

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the strategic brand thinking and insights informing the proposed naming direction for the Waikato public transport network, and to seek the Subcommittee's feedback on the options presented.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. This report summarises the background, insights, strategic direction and naming developed to date and provides Subcommittee with a clear understanding of the thinking that will inform future phases of work.
3. Waikato's public transport network is performing well operationally, but the customer experience remains fragmented and confusing, particularly for non-users. The *Public Transport Brand* Strategic Investment Proposal, endorsed through the LTP 2024–2034, is now being delivered to better align system performance with public perception and support patronage growth. A strategic review identified an opportunity to create a simpler, more unified, and more reassuring public transport brand.
4. The resulting brand impact idea, "Our Movement Powers Potential" positions the network as a system that supports connection, confidence, and opportunity for people, communities, and the region. Guided by this direction, two naming options have been shortlisted for feedback: *Waikato Transport (WKT)* and *Transport for Waikato (TfW).*

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Public Transport Branding Refresh* (RTC Public Transport Subcommittee, 9 March 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

5. Waikato's public transport network operates effectively across a complex mix of services and brands, but the user experience is fragmented and confusing. While regular users report high and improving satisfaction, this has not translated into a simple or intuitive experience—particularly for non-users.
6. "Public Transport Brand", the Strategic Investment Proposal, endorsed through the LTP 2024–2034 public consultation, is now being delivered. The work takes a strategic brand and user experience approach to better align system performance with public perception, with the aim of increasing patronage and supporting the network's long-term viability.

7. A strategic review assessed the network, customer and community needs, the transport category, and Waikato's cultural context using a 4Cs framework (Company, Customer, Category, and Cultural analysis) and a Te Ao Māori lens. The findings highlight an opportunity to create a simpler, more unified, and reassuring public transport brand that positions movement as a source of connection, confidence, and potential.

8. The resulting brand impact idea**,** "Our Movement Powers Potential," positions Waikato's public transport network as a system that not only functions well, but actively empowers people, communities, and the region to thrive socially, economically, and emotionally.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

9. Considering the brand impact idea of "Our movement powers potential" different naming options were identified for the Waikato public transport network. Selected names directly reference the network, key benefits or relative experiences and are easy to abbreviate and recognise.

10. Shortlisted names are as follows:

Option 1:	Option 2:
Waikato Transport	Transport for Waikato
Acronym: WKT	Acronym: TfW

11. Both names lead with "Waikato" to acknowledge the region, people, heritage, and the waterways as foundations of identity and movement. Using "Transport" keeps the brand flexible across current and future modes. While simple, memorable acronyms make it easy to say and recall.

12. The visual identity is being developed from the ground up, guided by wayfinding research, to deliver a practical visual brand identity system that works across vehicles, stops, signage, digital platforms, and communications. It reflects the Waikato region, aligns with WRC's Passenger Experience Roadmap, and is designed to adapt for future growth.

13. The preferred name, visual brand concepts and tone of voice will be tested with users to validate clarity and ease of use before finalization. All elements will be assessed for usability and cost-effective implementation to ensure a durable, future-ready brand identity.

14. The timing of this phase is on a critical path ahead of significant investment in the bus contract renewal programme. This ensures the new branding requirements are incorporated within the procurement of the new 9-year bus fleet contracts.

15. The LTP budget for 2026/27 assumed investment in implementation of the creative content and logo across all digital and printed channels.

ĒTAHI ATU TAKE | OTHER MATTERS

Brand architecture considerations

16. The current brand architecture includes multiple services and sub-brands across urban and regional networks, alongside constraints where certain brands cannot be changed. This complexity contributes to confusion and inconsistency.

17. Future considerations include removing or consolidating elements such as names and colours where possible, while using clearer numbering and destination-based information to support ease of use. Further work is under way to explore practical pathways to achieve this.

Cultural context and Te Ao Maori lens

18. In Te Ao Māori, movement is a living force that carries mauri, creating connection, purpose, and possibility. The Waikato awa embodies this as a living ancestor, symbolising heritage, leadership, and the many forms of strength through movement over time. This cultural grounding reinforces the importance of creating a transport system that is not authoritarian or forceful, but empowering, life-giving, and supportive of collective wellbeing.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

19. Complexity and fragmentation are limiting the ability to feel effortless, intuitive, and confidence-building for public transport users and non-users and therefore limiting patronage growth. The strategic work completed to date identifies a clear opportunity to create a simple, unified, and reassuring brand that supports movement as a positive force for people, communities, and the region.

20. This work is being brought to Subcommittee now to provide visibility of the strategic thinking and proposed naming direction for Waikato public transport network.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. Waikato Transport - Masterbrand Overview March 2026 (Doc #34772173) ⇩

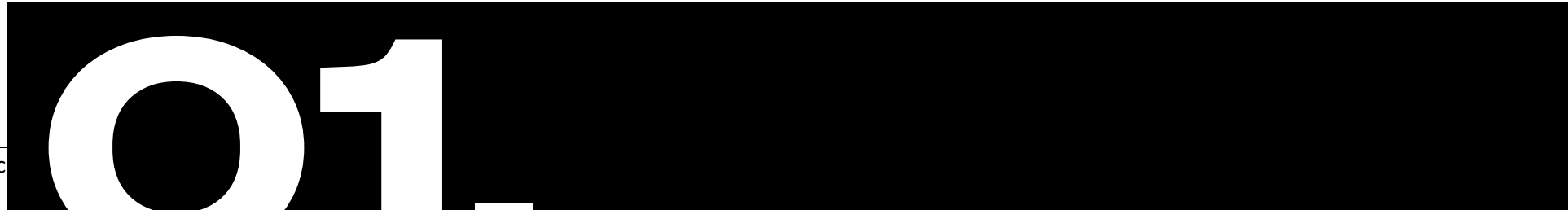
SPECIAL

Waikato Transport

Agenda

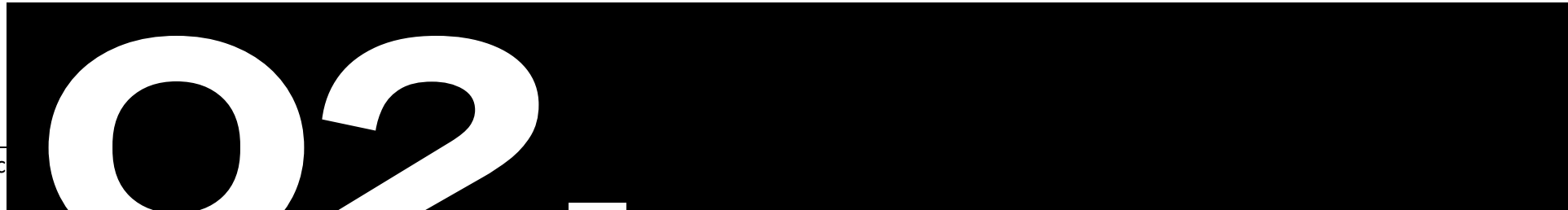
Item 6.8 - Attac

01. Strategy Approach


01

Waikato Transport - Strategic Masterbrand on a Page

Opportunity	Create a movement system that helps our people, communities, and region thrive by making the Waikato feel more confident, connected and curious.


02

Naming Territories we Considered

Our Movement Powers Potential

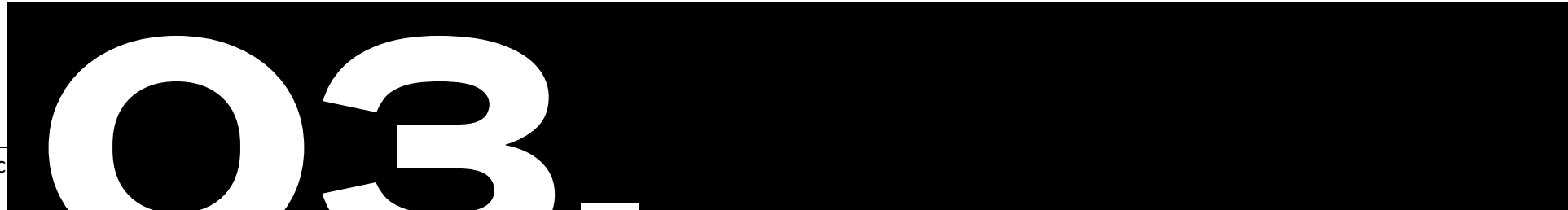
Option 1

Waikato Transport
WT or WKT

Option 2

Transport for Waikato
TfW

Shortlisted Names


03

Visual Identity

Creating an identity that works

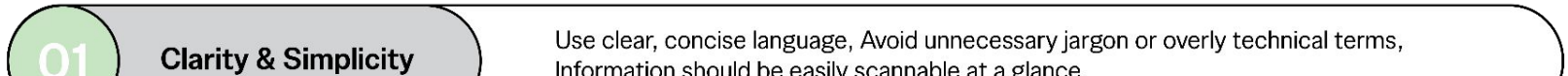
Wayfinding Snapshot Observations

Key Wayfinding Recommendations

Five key recommendations are proposed to better meet user expectations of a bus network, to optimise usability and functionality.

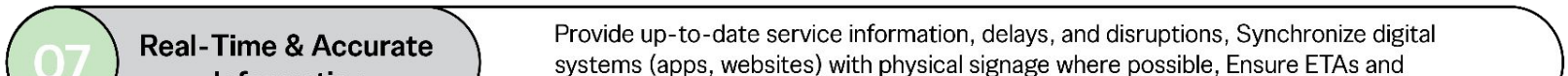
System Principles Recommendations

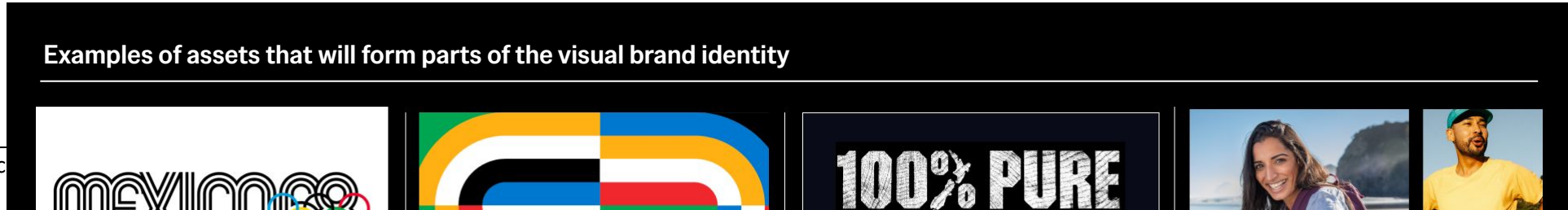
Drawing on insights from best-in-class bus network information systems, it is recommended these principles be considered:

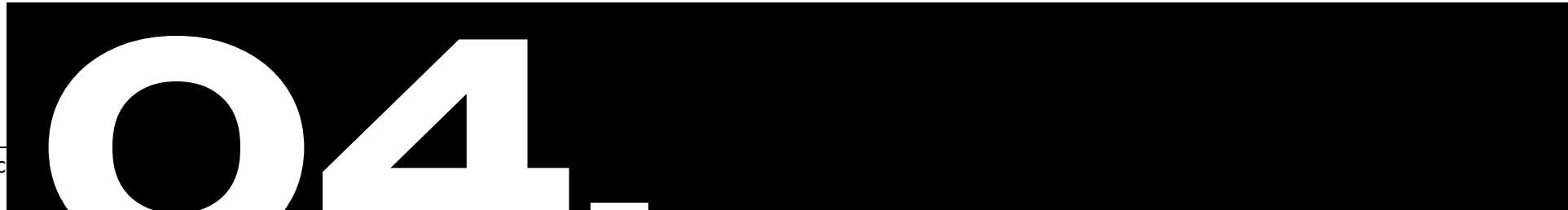


System Principles Recommendations (continued)

Drawing on insights from best-in-class bus network information systems, it is recommended these principles be considered:




Examples of assets that will form parts of the visual brand identity
100% PURE



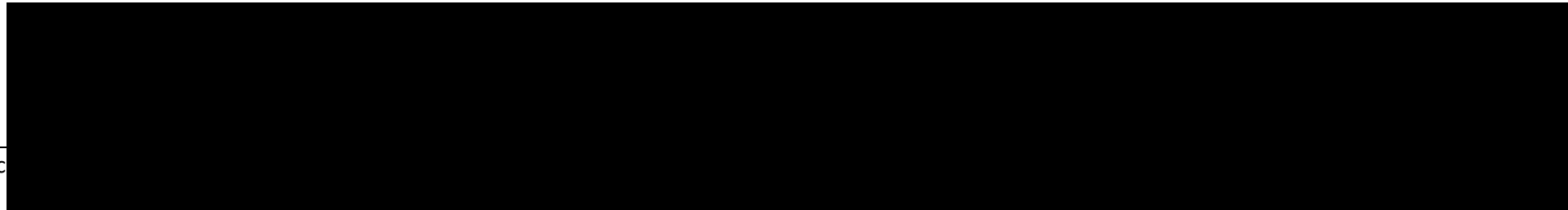
Brand Next Steps

Developing the Brand Identity System

Item 6.8 - Attac

Project Blueprint | Waikato Transport

Core purpose of the project
Articulate the why and what we stand for. Structured around six core phases ensuring both creative excellence and commercial clarity at every stage. And establishing a clear plan to implement.



7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia	**Draw on, draw on,**
Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui	**Draw on to the supreme sacredness**
kia wātea, kia māmā,	**To clear, to free**
te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,	**our heart, body and soul**
i te ara takatū	**Our pathway prepared**
Koia rā e Rongo	**Lo, there is peace**
e whakairia ake ki runga	**suspended high above**
kia tina! TINA!	**manifest!**
Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!	**draw together!**
	Affirm!