

Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-35 submission

To: Environment Canterbury

From: Temuka Community Board

Date: 23 October 2024

Introduction

The Temuka Community Board welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 (the Plan).

This submission is made by the Temuka Community Board, 2 King George Place, Timaru. The contact person for the Temuka Community Board is the Chair, Charles Scarsbrook who can be contacted via email at Charles.Scarsbrook@timdc.govt.nz

We support the submissions made by the Geraldine and Pleasant Point Community Boards as well as the submission made by Timaru District Council.

Background

The Temuka Community Board represents the townships of Temuka, Winchester and a large rural community in the Timaru District.

Over the last two years the Community Board has worked on a Strategic Plan with the community to highlight priorities for our community. We have several key objectives in this plan including:

Live, Work and Play

- Remaining local and family-oriented means having housing choice and diversity for all ages and stages - especially into retirement - alongside medical facilities **and shared transport**.

Stop, Stay and Spend

- Improve connections with the wider district.

Furthermore a recent report titled “Tiny But Mighty – Otago Medical School Community Contact Week Project” states the following.

*Despite these strengths, Temuka and Pleasant Point still face several barriers to health and well-being. Medical services are limited to only three medical practices, each practice has one GP who are nearing retirement. This creates significant pressure on the healthcare system, leading to long wait times for appointments. **For these rural towns, access to specialized care often requires travelling to Timaru, which is challenging with limited public transport services.** Positively, Temuka offers help with a community car, which can be booked for use. However, gasoline fees are paid by the user. This further exacerbates healthcare access issues, particularly for urgent or ongoing health concerns.*

We wish to highlight the following points.

General

We support Environment Canterbury's commitment to improving the environment, growing patronage, enhancing accessibility, fostering innovation, and ensuring affordability.

Whilst it may initially seem understandable that the majority of the focus of the draft Plan is on the Greater Christchurch area given its significant current and projected future population, we are concerned that provincial and rural areas are not getting their "fair share". Funding for, and subsidising of, provincial and rural services appears to be declining in real terms compared to urban public transport, likely leading to either diminished local services or higher user fees.

Policy 1.5 Community Vehicle Trusts

The Community Vehicle Trusts play a critical role in providing accessible and affordable transport options for residents in semi-rural areas like Temuka. These trusts enable our community, especially the elderly, disabled, and those without private transport, to remain connected with essential services and social networks.

In the 2023/2024 Year the Temuka Community Vehicle:

- travelled 19,000 kms
- undertook 900 separate trips
- utilised 2,880 volunteer driver hours (note this does not include committee time)

We ask Environment Canterbury to:

- Increase funding for Community Vehicle Trusts. Our understanding is the dollar value of funding has not increased for several years yet costs (mainly fuel, insurance and maintenance) have increased dramatically.
- Recognise the essential role these trusts play in achieving key goals outlined in the draft plan, such as enhancing accessibility and social inclusion.
- Consider how to support Community Vehicle Trusts through the MyWay service.
- Consider setting up a fund where Vehicle Trusts could apply for financial assistance to upgrading vehicles to lower operational cost and lower emission options.

Whilst we appreciate the continued financial support of our Community Vehicle Trusts we note that the long term sustainability and financial viability of the trusts is highly dependent on volunteers. Whilst we are not asking or expecting Environment Canterbury to pay volunteers for their hours, it does highlight the significant “sacrifice” that provincial and rural communities make to ensure the sustainability of their public transport networks. This contribution that does not occur in urban contexts – where we understand up to 90% of each trip is subsidised – highlights the urban-rural disparities in the current funding model. We argue, on equity grounds, that provincial public transport is worthy of additional support.

Additional support would not necessarily have to come at a significant cost, especially if there are opportunities to create efficiencies within the operating models. We request that Environment Canterbury investigate any opportunities to gain efficiencies and reduce the call on volunteers’ time. Notwithstanding any such potential changes, we wish to retain the core principle at the heart of the trusts – local people taking local people places.

Policy 1.7 Regional Connections

A reliable and well-connected public transport system between Temuka and Timaru is essential for our community. Many residents rely on access to Timaru for employment, education, healthcare, and leisure activities.

We ask that Environment Canterbury consider the expansion of the current public transport service between Temuka and Timaru.

Conclusion

We believe that addressing these areas will contribute significantly to achieving the vision outlined in the draft plan and will benefit both the Temuka community and the wider Canterbury region. It will also help meet a number of the Key Objectives and Priorities identified by the Temuka Community in their Strategic Plan.

We thank Environment Canterbury for considering our submission and look forward to continued collaboration.

Nga mihi,

Charles Scarsbrook

Temuka Community Board Chair