

Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-35 submission

To: Environment Canterbury

From: Pleasant Point Community Board

Date: 23 October 2024

Introduction

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

This submission is made by the Pleasant Point Community Board, 2 King George Place, Timaru. The contact person for the Pleasant Point Community Board is the Deputy Chair, Ross Munro who can be contacted via email at Ross.munro@timdc.govt.nz

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

Background

The Pleasant Point Community Board represents the townships of Pleasant Point, Cave 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:

Objective 1 – Ensure that local events and businesses are sustainable and well supported

- A strong, resilient and adaptable local economy that includes **tourism** and generates new events and businesses

Objective 2 – Retain, maintain and enhance local infrastructure, facilities and amenities

- Priority 2 – Extended bus services including school buses

Objective 3 – Retain or improve connection with the wider district

- Priority 1 – Expanded community vehicle service

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 Pleasant Point. 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 Pleasant Point Community Vehicle:

- travelled 20,804kms
- transported 586 passengers

- utilised 693 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.
- In future consider how to support Community Vehicle Trusts through the MyWay service.

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. One potential opportunity relates to the trusts’ phone-answering services and as the services expand the additional voluntary resource this utilises. We wonder if in future there is the opportunity to utilise the current MyWay customer service/phone-answering service to assist trusts.

We request that Environment Canterbury investigate this possibility in future and any other 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. At present this local connection provides benefits far greater than public transport to our users of this service.

Policy 1.7 Regional Connections

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

Pleasant Point and surrounding districts, to travel to Timaru and elsewhere is our community car which of course needs to be booked.

In addition to this the Pleasant Point Strategic Plan identifies events and tourism as a factor in meeting one of the key objectives. As there is currently no option for public transport from Timaru and other parts of our region to Pleasant Point, it limits the opportunities for tourists (both local and international) to visit the Pleasant Point Community. It also limits the opportunities for other South Canterbury residents to attend events held in Pleasant Point.

We recommend:

- Establishing a public transport service between Pleasant Point and Timaru (multiple times per week)
- Consider delivering this service by expanding the My Way service.

Policy 1.4 Specialist Services (School Buses)

A specific area of concern is the provision of school buses from Pleasant Point to Timaru. The Ministry of Education has undertaken a review of school bus routes including the current service catering to high school students from Pleasant Point. This generated considerable concern and engagement in the Pleasant Point community.

At this stage, although there has been a change to entitlement for students attending public schools in Timaru, the Ministry has accommodated these students for the mean time. However the longevity of this arrangement is at risk as the routes will be reviewed again in five years' time. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of public transport from Pleasant Point to Timaru.

Given the reliance on the current arrangement with the Aoraki School Transport Service (ASTN) and the Ministry, which is at risk of continuing long term, we ask Environment Canterbury to make a formal commitment under this policy to provide school bus services to Timaru to ensure safe and reliable transport for schoolchildren, should the current services provided by ASTN and the Ministry no longer be available.

Conclusion

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

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

Nga mihi,

Ross Munro

Pleasant Point Community Board Deputy Chair