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To Otago Regional Council

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Draft Otago Regional Council Annual Plan 2022/23

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

Contact:

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**Introduction**

The Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a pan-impairment disabled person’s organisation that works to realise an equitable society, where all disabled people (of all impairment types and including women, Māori, Pasifika, young people) are able to direct their own lives. DPA works to improve social indicators for disabled people and for disabled people to be recognised as valued members of society. DPA and its members work with the wider disability community, other DPOs, government agencies, service providers, international disability organisations, and the public by:

* telling our stories and identifying systemic barriers
* developing and advocating for solutions
* celebrating innovation and good practice

**The submission**

DPA welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Otago Regional Council’s (ORC) Annual Plan 2022-23.

DPA wishes to make several points in respect of the proposals contained in this annual plan around accessible transport, air quality and climate change.

**Accessible Transport**

DPA commends the ORC for accepting the Government’s recent additional temporary funding which facilitated a significant reduction in public transport fares for buses and other platforms, including Total Mobility (TM), both of which are used by many disabled people. This significant reduction in fares has seen a major increase in bus patronage across the Otago region, especially in the main centres of Dunedin and Queenstown.

The impact of the recent fare reductions which have seen a 75 percent discount (instead of the usual 50 percent) applied for people who use Total Mobility to access both mobility and ordinary taxi services is yet unknown. However, going on the surge in usage which occurred following the adoption of fare free TM during the first Covid-19 lockdown in 2020, it is likely that there will have been another surge this time around.

However, DPA would like to see public transport become fare free for all bus and TM users across the country, which can only be undertaken with the provision of adequate funding from both central and local government. We are keen to see both central and local government make free fare/affordable public transport a permanent feature of the transport landscape and not just introduce it at times of crisis such as during the inflationary shock we are undergoing at present. In this regard, DPA supports the Aotearoa Public Transport Equity Coalition’s current campaign which, amongst other asks, is recommending the permanent introduction of fare free public transport across all of Aotearoa with adequate central and local government funding underpinning this.

DPA is concerned about the statements contained in the draft annual plan around the $2 fares requiring ‘further consideration’ due to fiscal issues. We understand that this shortfall will need to be addressed and that central government funding from Waka Kotahi/NZTA will need to be forthcoming in this instance. However, we also note that the DCC has made funding offers to ORC to maintain these fare levels in the past and these have, disappointingly, been turned down. DPA is keen for the $2 fare structure to be retained as this has been successful in lifting public transport patronage as noted above. We would like to see ORC re-commit to retaining the $2 fares and lobby central government for adequate funding to continue them with a view to moving to fare free public transport.

Also, while noting that there have been improvements in public transport provision for disabled people in Dunedin over the last decade, the reality is that there is more work that remains to be done, not only in Dunedin but throughout the region on this. We are aware of the recent comments in the *Otago Daily Times* by disability advocate Nick Stoneman about public bus access not being 100 percent fully accessible and/or safe along some routes in Dunedin and that much work still needs to be done to improve access around the bus hub as well.[[1]](#footnote-2)

DPA understands that initial accessibility audits have been undertaken of the bus hub for ORC by John Marrable from Livingwell Resource Centre who is a disabled person himself and an accredited barrier free auditor. DPA would like to see the issues that he and other disabled people have identified resolved during the coming year. DPA is keen for the disability responsiveness and awareness training for bus drivers to continue to be delivered by disabled people from across the impairment spectrum, including blind and low vision people, people with mobility impairments, people with learning disability, and Deaf and hard of hearing people.

Overall, DPA wants ORC to realise its own vision, articulated in its final Regional Passenger Transport Plan (RPTP) adopted in 2021, of having all public transport available to everyone on an inclusive basis through the full adoption of the universal journey where every aspect of any public transport passenger’s journey, including those of disabled passengers, is fully accessible.

**Air quality**

Secondly, DPA is concerned about the Council’s ongoing curbing of its air quality monitoring programme. We have raised this issue in our previous submission. While Council has committed to continuing air quality monitoring in this annual plan, we remain concerned at reports about monitoring and enforcement activities being cut back. DPA considers this work to be critical, especially for disabled people and people with health conditions who experience respiratory conditions, to know what the risks are in areas susceptible to bad air pollution, especially in urban centres. DPA recommends the full restoration of air quality monitoring and compliance activities across the region and that this be fully funded and given high priority.

**Climate change**

Thirdly, DPA wishes to highlight the impact that climate change will have on disabled people alongside other marginalised communities. ORC in planning for climate change, needs to firmly engage with the disability community as we will be one of the most severely impacted population groups and this is already becoming evident globally.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Disabled people, particularly those with mobility impairments, are at risk of being forced to move as part of any planned retreat, particularly from flat, low-lying communities in the future. We note the work that the DCC and ORC have started on the South Dunedin Future Project which aims to climate proof that community, given that it contains a high number of disabled people, from the worst vagaries of climate change.

DPA is keen to be more fully involved in the process of climate change planning going forward. We recommend that a process along the lines of that deployed in Bristol, UK, be used where their local council has engaged (and continues to engage in) climate change planning and dialogue with the local disability community. The city council there co-developed a plan with the Bristol Disability Equality Forum (a Bristol-based disabled people’s organisation which is cross-impairment based like DPA) around climate change and its impact on disabled people which aims to address accessibility and other issues from an environmental /disability lens.[[3]](#footnote-4)

As Dunedin and Otago councils progress towards their next 10 Year Plans, a process along these lines could be undertaken as a partnership between the DCC/ORC and disabled people to create a disability community climate change plan which would be incorporated into either existing or updated climate change plans, such as the ORC’s own climate change planning.

We wish to signal our interest in having Council start discussions around this now with the disability community so that this idea could be fully developed for inclusion in the next 10-year plan with appropriate funding to back this.

**UNCRPD**

The UNCRPD Articles most relevant to our submission are:

* Article 4.3 Involving disabled people and our organisations in decisions that affect us
* Article 9 Accessibility
* Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community
* Article 20: Personal mobility

New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026:

* Outcome 5: Accessibility
* Outcome 6: Attitudes
* Outcome 8: Leadership

**Wider impact on Disabled People**

Enabling disabled people to fully participate in society through our involvement in climate change awareness and action as well as providing accessible transport and air monitoring are just three of the things that ORC can do to meet its obligations under the UNCRPD and other international human rights agreements and domestic strategies.

**DPA’s recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** DPA recommends that ORC support moves towards free fare transport for all public transport users, including those who access this via the Total Mobility scheme. In the meantime, ORC should retain the $2 bus fares and lobby central government for sufficient funding to support this.

**Recommendation 2:**  DPA recommends that cuts to the air quality monitoring programme be reversed by the ORC so that sampling can resume in all locations around the region to identify where the worst polluted areas are. Steps should be taken to improve air quality for everyone through associated measures such as the ORC contributing funding to businesses and households to assist in the change to cleaner heating methods. These moves would benefit everyone, particularly people with health conditions who live with respiratory conditions.

**Recommendation 3**: DPA recommends that ORC working in collaboration with the DCC engages with the disability community through disabled people’s organisations which include DPA, on developing a Disability Community Climate Response Plan which would be incorporated into existing climate change plans/strategies.

**Conclusion**

DPA welcomes discussion on all aspects of this annual plan that we have commented upon. We look forward to having further dialogue with Council as the year progresses over the issues we have identified, some which are new and others ongoing.

1. Francis, O. (2022, April 23). Disability access lacking on buses and at bus stops. *Otago Daily Times*. <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/disability-access-lacking-buses-and-bus-stops> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Schulte, C. (2020, March 28). People With Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/people-disabilities-needed-fight-against-climate-change#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20are%20at,said%20in%20a%20recent%20report>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Bristol Disability Equality Forum (2020). *Community Climate Action: Let’s Make Change with Bristol Disability Equality Forum*. Retrieved from (https://bristoldef.org.uk/community-climate-action/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)