February 2022

To Waikato Regional Council

Please find attached DPA’s submission on Public Transport Business Improvement Review

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

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**Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ**

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 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 Environment Waikato’s Transport Business Improvement Plan. We support the broad objectives of the plan and what it is seeking to deliver both in operational and service terms.

DPA specifically notes and welcomes the references in the Plan to the Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan’s (RLTP) objective of improving access and mobility and the recognition that this aligns with key strategic documents including the Ministry of Transport’s Outcomes Framework.

Nonetheless, for DPA, we wish to seek clarification as to why, for example, planning and funding issues relating to public transport accessibility have not been more extensively canvassed in this plan. For example, will future funding models enable expansion of the BusIt Scheme which provides free fares for disabled bus users and their support people in the Waikato? According to the plan, while there is scope for Waikato to join any pilots of the Government’s proposed Generational Investment Approach (GIA), there must be an assurance from central government that alongside this there will be a degree of flexibility in any funding models for regions, including Waikato, to be able to continue and develop accessible, inclusive transport services and initiatives as well. Additional funding needs to come from both central and local government, including the Regional Council.

DPA believes that to ensure that the accessibility needs of disabled people are met that more comprehensive data collection is undertaken to ascertain both current and future needs.

We have made several recommendations in this submission around the need for Environment Waikato and other participating Waikato local authorities to make the goal of an inclusive, accessible, and low or no-cost public transport a vital element of this plan. However, we have no opinion on the best operating/governance structure for Waikato transport, except that it should include representation from a suitably qualified disabled people with transport knowledge on any governance body and disabled people should be appointed to work at all levels of the organisation as well, particularly in transport planning and management roles.

**The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (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
* Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026:

* Outcome 5 - Accessibility

**DPA’s recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** DPA seeks clarification around as to why public transport accessibility issues have not been more extensively canvassed in this plan.

**Recommendation 2:** DPA recommends that if the Council decides to join any pilot of the Generational Investment Approach that it seeks assurances from central government that there will be flexibility built into any future funding models to ensure that all regions, including Waikato, can fund innovative programmes such as the successful ‘BusIt’ Scheme which covers disabled people and their support people who use public buses within the region.

**Recommendation 3:** DPA recommends that as part of plan implementation that Council, acting in partnership with central government, inject additional funding into improving public transport accessibility throughout the region including for accessible buses, mobility services, ride share schemes and other options.

**Recommendation 4:** DPA recommends that Council collect more data on disabled people, their travel patterns, where barriers exist, and how barriers affect them physically and mentally to enable both an accurate measurement of how disabled people are using public transport and where any additional funding could be best spent in the accessible transport space.

**Recommendation 5:** DPA has no view on what type of entity should oversee transport in the Waikato region. However, if a CCO or more centralised structure is chosen, our belief is that its success would depend on any services that it would offer to public transport users as, otherwise, if this is not the case, then services might become less responsive to individual customers, especially if there is greater centralisation of decision-making authority around transport.

**Recommendation 6:** DPA recommends that whatever entity structure is chosen to oversee transport in the Waikato, whether it is the status quo or the change to another structure, that disabled people with public transport knowledge and experience be appointed to its governance body and that disabled people be employed at all levels of the organisation, including within transport planning and management roles.

**Conclusion**

Overall, DPA tentatively welcomes this plan on the basis that it is changed to incorporate more detail on how the proposals will impact on transport accessibility going forward. We believe that there is a need to incorporate greater data collection on disabled people’s transport usage (and that of other population groups) into the plan so that this can aid in the planning and funding of transport services in the Waikato region. While we have no opinion on the best option for running Waikato’s transport services, there is still the need to ensure that the voices of disabled people with public transport knowledge and skills is incorporated into the structures of any new regional transport entity that is established.

DPA has both a Kaituitui (Community Networker) and Regional Policy Manager [see cover page] who can be reached out to on this submission and we would welcome any contact about this.

If oral submissions are being called for, we wish to participate in any hearings.