

Joint WDC-NRC Whangarei Public Transport Working Party Minutes

Meeting held in the Council Chamber, 36 Water Street, Whangarei
on Tuesday 10 February 2026, commencing at 9:00 am - 10:00am

Tuhinga/Present:

Chair - NRC Councillor, Amy Macdonald
NRC Councillor, Jack Craw
NRC Councillor, Joe Carr

I Tae Mai/In Attendance:

Full Meeting
NRC Transport Manager, Chris Powell
NRC GM Community Resilience, Louisa Gritt
NRC Secretariat, Haylee Labelle

The Chair declared the meeting open at 0900am with karakia.

Ngā Mahi Whakapai/Housekeeping (Item 1.0)

Ngā whakapahā/Apologies (Item 2.0)

Moved (Carr / Craw)

That the apologies from Councillor Flower, Martin, Connop for non-attendance be received.

Carried

Receipt of Minutes - 21 July 2025 (Item 4.1)

Report from Haylee Labelle, Personal Assistant Community Resilience

Moved (Craw / Carr)

That the minutes of the Whangarei Public Transport Working Party meeting held on 21 July 2025, are noted.

Carried

Receipt of Action Sheet (Item 5.1)

Report from Haylee Labelle, Personal Assistant Community Resilience

Moved (Macdonald / Craw)

That the action sheet be received.

Carried

Action:

1. **NRC Transport Manager to follow-up with WDC to request an update on the status and prioritisation of T2 lanes and bus lane projects, including any planned improvements to the hospital intersection and intentions regarding a bus lane on Maunu Road, and ask WDC members to be prepared to speak to this at the next meeting.**

Terms of Reference (Item 6.1)

Report from Haylee Labelle, Personal Assistant Community Resilience

It was agreed that this item will be carried over to the next meeting of the working party due to the absence of all WDC members

Carried

Operational Report (Item 6.2)

Report from Chris Powell, Transport Manager - Northland Regional Council

Moved (Carr / Crow)

That the report 'Operational Report' by Chris Powell, Transport Manager - Northland Regional Council and dated 22 December 2025, be received.

Carried

Secretarial notes: Staff reported a gradual increase in passenger numbers on rural services, attributing this to the extension of Super Gold card eligibility, which has encouraged more usage, particularly on the Hikurangi route.

Staff gave an update on the impact of the fares increase on the CityLink and SchoolLink services. There was an overall decrease of around 8%. The decrease in scholars was 2%.

Members discussed the shift of some students from city link to school link buses, The importance of school bus services in reducing congestion and fostering long-term public transport habits was also talked about.

In response to a request from WDC Deputy Mayor Scott McKenzie, councillors debated the 'chicken and egg' situation of increasing bus frequency versus patronage levels. Staff stated that there has been a passenger decrease post implementation of the T2 lane. Staff have yet to ascertain if this decrease is due to the T2 lane or the fare increase implemented at the same time. The members agreed that there be no increase in services at this time and that detailed data be provided to inform future decisions at future meetings.

Attendees discussed operational challenges such as the impact of new pedestrian crossings on bus punctuality, the limited scope of T2 lanes, and the difficulty in hiring additional drivers for trial service increases due to employment uncertainty.

Discussed the prioritization of T2 and bus lanes on various roads, the rationale behind current priorities, and the working groups role in influencing District Council decisions, ultimately agreeing to seek updates from WDC on project status and future plans.

Reviewed the historical prioritisation of T2 lanes, noting that Kamo Road was identified as the highest priority, followed by Maunu Road and Riverside, with Tikipunga excluded due to road width constraints and feasibility concerns.

Clarified that while the working group can discuss and attempt to influence T2 and bus lane priorities, the final decision rests with WDC as the roading authority, and the working party's main purpose is to provide input and advocate for preferred outcomes.

It was agreed to formally request updates from WDC regarding the status and prioritization of T2 and bus lane projects, including any intentions to implement bus lanes on Manley Road, and to ensure these updates are provided at the next meeting.

Concerns were raised about the availability of NZTA funding for these projects, the complexity of implementing T2 lanes at certain intersections, and the need for property acquisition and infrastructure changes for future expansions.

Confirmed that current SchoolLink services adequately cover major high schools and intermediate schools, with additional services implemented to address specific needs such as antisocial behaviour and demand from certain suburbs.

It was clarified that national policy requires a minimum farebox contribution for council-contracted bus services, preventing further fare subsidies for school buses, and that third-party revenue (e.g., advertising) is already factored into the funding model.

Explored long-term strategies for public transport, including the potential for park and ride facilities, the need for a joined-up approach with WDC leadership, and the targeting of commuter markets to reduce congestion.

An action was proposed for the Chair to meet with the Deputy Mayor to gauge the current appetite for public transport initiatives, the future of T2 lanes, and the potential for park and ride, ensuring alignment with WDC's strategic direction.

The group identified commuters as the primary target for expanded public transport services, recognizing that shopping and other off-peak travel would likely remain car-dependent, and discussed the potential impact of even modest modal shifts on congestion.

Discussed upcoming changes to the Total Mobility Scheme, including reductions in subsidy rates and tighter eligibility criteria, and the implications for service sustainability and communication with the public.

The Ministry of Transport and NCTA are reducing the maximum subsidy for Total Mobility trips from 75% to 65% and lowering the fare cap, effective 1 July, in response to significant budget overruns in major regions.

A review of eligibility criteria is underway, with the Ministry of Transport and NZTA aiming to tighten access to the scheme to ensure sustainability, and a ministerial meeting scheduled to finalise changes.

Noted that Northland region remains on budget due to proactive measures such as requiring doctor certificates and capping fares, and credited WDC for maintaining its subsidy contribution despite broader funding pressures.

Plans are in place to coordinate with the communications team to clearly explain the changes to the public, emphasising that the NRC operates within national guidelines and is not responsible for the subsidy reductions.

Discussed the potential impact of future local government restructuring on public transport governance, funding models, and the distribution of rates across the region.

Debated whether future funding for public transport would be based on district-wide rates or area-of-benefit models, recognising that changes could lead to shifts in who pays for services and the potential for cross-subsidization.

It was noted that any significant changes to funding or governance would require amendments to the Land Transport Management Act, and that a joined-up public transport strategy could be facilitated by council amalgamation.

Actions:

1. **NRC Transport team to monitor bus patronage on the T2 lane route and provide information at future meetings to inform decisions on increasing bus service frequency on this route.**
2. **The chair to meet with WDC Deputy Mayor to discuss the appetite for public transport improvements, the future of T2 lanes, and opportunities such as park and ride.**
3. **NRC Transport Manager to check and confirm whether the transport rate is collected district-wide or only for the urban area, and report findings to the working party by email**

Whakamutunga (Conclusion)

The meeting concluded at 0952am with karakia by the chair.