Hamilton City Council Feedback

Waikato Regional Public Transport Plan 2022–2032 Fare Policy Review

Waikato Regional Council

5 October 2026

Hamilton City Council
Te kaunihera o Kirikiriroa

Strategic Context for this Feedback

Council has endorsed **The Mayor's Plan 2025 - 2028** to inform the projects and services it will deliver to ensure Hamilton has what it needs now and for the future – efficiently, responsibly, and sustainably. The seven guiding themes of The Mayor's Plan are:

- **Sensible, cost-effective infrastructure**
- **Grow with balance**
- **A central city to be proud of**
- **City places and services that work for people**
- **Open for business**
- **A transparent and efficient organisation**
- **Financial responsibility**

Council Approval and Status

This feedback was circulated to all Elected Members and Maangai Maaori for review and comment prior to lodgement. While it has not been formally considered or adopted by the full Council, it has been endorsed by **Councillor Sue Moroney** and **Councillor Mesh Macdonald**, Hamilton City Council's representatives on the Waikato Regional Transport Committee. Both councillors also authorised its lodgement on the Council's behalf.

Feedback # 850

Key Messages and Recommendations

1. **Supports the proposed youth fare package**, including the 20 per cent youth bus discount, extending the Te Huia youth concession to passengers aged 5 to 18, and applying a nine-journey weekly fare cap to youth bus and rail travel, within the funding envelope proposed through the Fare Policy Review.
2. **Recommends that Waikato Regional Council investigate and model options to improve affordable access to major destinations such as Waikato Hospital and the University of Waikato**, including consideration of an expanded Hamilton inner fare zone and other fare-structure options that support patronage growth, accessibility, and mode shift.
3. **Requests that patronage growth, congestion reduction, accessibility, parking demand and mode-shift outcomes be considered alongside affordability and financial sustainability** when fare policies and future fare levels are assessed.
4. **Requests continued engagement with Hamilton City Council on significant future fare decisions affecting Hamilton**, including decisions relating to Te Huia and any subsequent review of Hamilton's fare-zone structure.

Introduction

5. Hamilton City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the **Waikato Regional Public Transport Plan 2022–2032 Fare Policy Review.**
6. Hamilton is experiencing rapid population growth and increasing transport demand. Improving public transport patronage is increasingly important to support growth, reduce congestion and parking pressures, improve transport choice, and make more efficient use of existing transport infrastructure. As the largest urban public transport market in the Waikato region, it's important that Hamilton has an effective and affordable public transport system.
7. Hamilton City Council recognises that fares are only one factor influencing public transport use. Service frequency, reliability, convenience and accessibility are also important. However, fare policy can support increased patronage and longer-term mode shift if it is designed to make public transport an attractive and affordable option.
8. Council therefore considers that the fare framework should:
    - Encourage increased public transport patronage;
    - Improve affordability, particularly for young people and frequent users;
    - Support mode shift and help manage congestion and parking demand;
    - Remain simple and understandable for passengers; and
    - Balance these outcomes with the need for financial sustainability.

Support for Youth Concessions

9. Hamilton City Council supports the proposed youth fare package, including:
    - A 20 per cent discount on youth bus fares;
    - Retaining the 50 per cent youth discount on Te Huia and extending eligibility from ages 5 to 15 to ages 5 to 18; and
    - Applying a nine-journey weekly fare cap to youth passengers on bus and rail services.
10. Council considers that applying a discount to every youth bus journey would make the benefit available to young people who do not travel frequently enough to reach the existing fare cap. Extending Te Huia eligibility to 18-year-olds would also provide greater consistency in the treatment of young passengers across bus and rail services.
11. Council supports these measures because they would improve affordability for young people and families and could help establish public transport habits at an early age. This has the potential to contribute to longer-term patronage growth and mode shift.
12. Council's support for the proposed youth fare package is within the funding envelope proposed by Waikato Regional Council through this review. This support should not be interpreted as advocating for an increase in the overall level of public subsidy for public transport.
13. **Recommendation:** Adopt the proposed youth bus and rail concessions and the proposed nine-journey weekly youth fare cap.

Hamilton Inner Fare Zone Review

14. Hamilton City Council considers that the review presents an opportunity to assess whether Hamilton's fare structure could do more to encourage urban bus travel.
15. The consultation proposal retains the discounted Hamilton Central City Zone but does not propose changes to its current boundary. This means that most bus journeys within Hamilton would continue to be charged at the same zonal fare, regardless of the length of the journey or whether the passenger is travelling to a high-demand destination.
16. Council notes that significant congestion occurs on key transport corridors across Hamilton, including the Waikato River bridge crossings and major arterial routes serving the central city. Council considers that any review of Hamilton's fare-zone structure should assess whether fare settings could contribute to reducing congestion, increasing public transport patronage and improving access to major destinations.
17. Council considers that fare structures can influence travel behaviour, particularly for journeys to destinations where parking demand is constrained or where significant investment has been made in managing parking supply. This is particularly relevant around the central city, Waikato Hospital, Hamilton East, and the University of Waikato. Council therefore requests that Waikato Regional Council investigate and model options for an expanded Hamilton inner fare zone. This work should consider:
    - Extending the discounted area beyond the existing Central City Zone;
    - Options that improve the affordability of travel to and from major destinations such as Waikato Hospital and the University of Waikato, regardless of where passengers are travelling from within Hamilton, recognising their significance as major employment, education and service hubs.

- Identifying a rational, readily understood boundary that supports ease of use and reflects travel patterns within Hamilton;
- Drawing on previous work undertaken by Waikato Regional Council, including the options assessed through earlier fare-zone investigations, while ensuring that future analysis adequately considers congestion reduction, destination accessibility, parking demand and mode-shift outcomes;
- The effect of different fare levels on passenger demand and travel behaviour, including the relative cost of public transport compared with private vehicle use;
- The distributional and equity effects on passengers inside and outside the expanded zone;
- The implications for fare revenue and public funding; and
- Whether an expanded zone, or destination-based fare incentives, could be implemented through Motu Move.

18. Council is not necessarily seeking a larger geographic fare zone for its own sake. Rather, Council is interested in whether fare structures can be used to improve affordable access to key destinations such as Waikato Hospital and the University of Waikato, regardless of where passengers are travelling from within Hamilton. Council considers that this issue warrants further investigation through future modelling and analysis.

19. Council is not seeking to predetermine the final boundary or fare levels through this feedback. It is requesting robust modelling so that the patronage, congestion, equity and financial implications of feasible options can be assessed before future decisions are made.

20. **Recommendation:** Undertake detailed investigation and modelling of an expanded Hamilton inner fare zone, including options covering Waikato Hospital, the University of Waikato and other high-demand destinations.

Te Huia Fares

21. Hamilton City Council notes the proposal to establish separate bus and Te Huia fare structures, with Te Huia fares set by station rather than by bus fare zones.

22. Council notes that the decision to establish separate Te Huia fares was considered through the Annual Plan process rather than through this Fare Policy Review. Given the implications of Te Huia fare decisions for Hamilton passengers and connecting services, Council would welcome opportunities for earlier engagement on future fare decisions affecting the service.

23. Future decisions about Te Huia's fare structure and fare levels should be informed by their potential effects on patronage, accessibility, integration with connecting bus services and regional connectivity.

24. **Recommendation:** Engage with Hamilton City Council and affected communities before significant future decisions are made about Te Huia fares and fare products.

SuperGold Peak Travel

25. Hamilton City Council notes the proposal to remove locally funded free SuperGold travel on buses during weekday peak periods, while retaining free off-peak travel and free travel on weekends and public holidays under the national SuperGold scheme.

26. Council recognises that there are competing considerations. Removing the locally funded peak concession could release funding for other public transport priorities, including initiatives intended to

increase youth patronage. Conversely, the change could increase travel costs for SuperGold cardholders who need to travel during peak periods, including users in areas where service availability limits their ability to travel off-peak.

27. Council also notes that the proposal would align more closely with the operation of the SuperGold scheme elsewhere in New Zealand and may assist with the future implementation of the Motu Move national ticketing system.

28. Council requests that Waikato Regional Council carefully assess:

- Current SuperGold travel during the affected peak periods;
- The impacts on passengers who rely on peak services;
- Whether some communities would have reasonable off-peak alternatives;
- The financial implications of retaining or removing the concession; and
- The comparative patronage benefits of alternative uses of the funding.

29. **Recommendation:** Consider the evidence and consultation feedback on the distributional, patronage and financial effects of the proposal before determining whether free weekday peak SuperGold travel should be retained.

Regional Fare Zones

30. Hamilton City Council notes the proposal to reduce the overall number of bus fare zones and cap the maximum bus fare at six zones.

31. As the proposed regional zone changes have limited direct implications for most journeys within Hamilton, Council does not express a position on the detailed configuration of the regional zones.

Conclusion

32. Hamilton City Council supports the overall direction of the Fare Policy Review and, in particular, the proposed youth fare package.

33. Council's principal additional request is for Waikato Regional Council to investigate and model an expanded Hamilton inner fare zone. More broadly, Council asks that patronage growth, congestion reduction, parking demand and mode-shift outcomes be considered alongside affordability and financial sustainability in future fare decisions.

34. Hamilton City Council's interest is not simply cheaper fares. Our interest is whether fare settings can contribute cost-effectively to patronage growth, congestion reduction and reduced parking demand, while remaining financially sustainable.

Further Information and Hearings

35. Should the Waikato Regional Council require clarification of the feedback from Hamilton City Council, or additional information, please contact **Martin Parkes** (Urban Transport Manager) on **07 838 6427**, or email **Martin.Parkes@hcc.govt.nz** in the first instance.

36. Hamilton City Council representatives **wish to speak in support of this feedback** at the Waikato Regional Council hearings scheduled for November 2026.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Sue Moroney
HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE
WAIKATO REGIONAL TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Yours faithfully

Councillor Mesh Macdonald
HAMILTON CITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE
WAIKATO REGIONAL TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

FURTHER INFORMATION
Hamilton City Council
Garden Place, Private Bag 3010, Hamilton

/hamiltoncitycouncil
@hamiltoncitycouncil
07 838 6699

hamilton.govt.nz