

Draft 2021-2031 Long Term Plan  
Waikato Regional Council  
Private Bag 3038  
Hamilton 3240

29 April 2021

Tēnā koe

**Re: Submission to Waikato Regional Council's Draft 2021/31 Long Term Plan.**

Waikato and Lakes DHBs together serve a population of over 500,000 people in the Waikato region. This submission presents the views of Waikato District Health Board (the DHB). In preparing this submission the views of Toi Te Ora Public Health, the public health unit for Lakes District Health Board, have also been included.

DHBs have a statutory responsibility under the Public Health and Disability Act 2000 to improve, promote and protect the health of people and communities with a focus on reducing adverse social and environmental effects on the health of people and communities.

The DHB's strategic imperatives include authentic collaboration with partner agencies and communities, and a radical improvement in Māori health outcomes by eliminating health inequities<sup>1</sup> for Māori<sup>2</sup>. Lakes DHB's strategic objective is to achieve health equity by improving health of the Lakes population, and by reducing or eliminating health inequalities.

The DHB supports the long-term intentions (Waikato Regional Council 10 Year Strategy goals) of Waikato Regional Council for Waikato region; for transport and water in particular. The draft Plan makes links to these goals and we broadly support associated activities identified in the draft Plan.

This submission focuses on projects identified under the five priorities contained within Waikato Regional Council's 2021-2031 Draft Long Term Plan (draft Plan). In particular, Proposal 1, Protecting our biodiversity, *Kia para te rerenga rauropi* (Option 1), Proposal 2 Sustainable homes scheme, *He kaupapa orange whare* (Option 1); and Proposal 4 (Passenger rail service, *He tēreina pāhihi*) (Option1). It is the DHB's view that these proposals, and preferred Council options, will protect and promote community health and wellbeing. For instance, healthy biodiversity helps people to thrive because the health of nature and of people is entwined and interconnected. Sustainable homes help minimise illness, reduce associated living costs and assist with climate change mitigation. Likewise, public transport helps improve the health of the population by reducing car dependency, increasing physical activity, providing options for those without access to a car, and reducing greenhouse emissions.

The DHB acknowledges the work Waikato Regional Council has been involved in on wellbeing and liveability via the Waikato Wellbeing project and the Waikato Plan. We also commend Council for its broader commitment to work alongside the DHB, iwi and other organisations on activities linked to housing and transport to improve community wellbeing across the Waikato region. This work is aligned with goals 3 and 4 of the DHB's ten year plan for health and wellbeing, [Te Korowai Waiora](#) (The Waikato DHB Health System Plan 2019) i.e. to support community aspirations to address the determinants of health; and to improve access to services.

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<sup>1</sup> Health inequities involves the unfair distribution of resources needed for health, unfair access to the opportunities available, and unfairness in the support offered to people when they are ill. The pursuit of health equity seeks to reduce the excess burden of ill health among socially and economically disadvantaged populations

<sup>2</sup> Downloaded from: <https://www.waikatodhb.health.nz/assets/Docs/About-Us/Key-Publications/Strategies/Waikato-DHB-Strategy-2016.pdf> 29 March 2018

Like you, the DHB is aware that the COVID response is putting pressure on community wellbeing in our district. COVID has already had major social and economic consequences for communities. Some groups have been particularly affected, including Māori, Pasifika, women, young people and older people. A community health needs assessment of the Bay of Plenty and Lakes districts carried out by Toi Te Ora recognised that building resilience and achieving equity to maximise health and wellbeing is a priority need, and that resilience and equity pathways include employment, housing, food security, mental wellbeing and environmental health protection.

Our submission response also includes reference to transport matters of likely mutual interest. With this in mind and as an aside in regards to transport, the DHB is a key funder of health related transport services. As noted at a recent Waikato Regional Connections Committee meeting, the DHB currently spend about \$1.7M (2019/20) on land transport services, of which \$1M is for health travel assistance reimbursements to health consumers via the National Travel Assistance policy (refer Attachment 1). These health transport services include community health transport services provided by community volunteers based in Taumarunui and other local towns across our District. The DHB and Community Waikato identified for Committee members during their presentations, community transport challenges and opportunities facing Waikato community transport providers.

### **Waikato DHB position**

Waikato DHB **supports** the following decisions and associated options identified in the draft Plan:

- Proposal 1: Protecting our biodiversity, *Kia parea te rerenga rauropi*, (Option 1).
- Proposal 2: Sustainable homes scheme, *He kaupapa oranga whare* (Option 1).
- Proposal 4: Passenger rail service, *He tēreina pāhihi* (Option 1).
- Proposal 7: Rates remission and postponement, *Te whakahekenga, whakatārewatanga anō o ngā tāke Kaunihera* (Option 1)

Waikato DHB **supports in principle** the following proposed projects identified in the draft Plan, but remains neutral on the two options given for each project.

Proposal 5 (Regional economic development funding, *Whakapakari pūtea ā-rohe*)

Waikato DHB is **neutral** on the following proposed projects identified in the draft Plan:

- Proposal 3: Lake Taupō protection project, *Te whakaruruhau a Taupō-nui-a-Tia*
- Proposal 6: Te Aroha suburban outlet drain, *Te waikeri puaha o te tapa tāone o Te Aroha*
- Proposal 8: Cost recovery changes for consent holders, *Te piki, heke utu rānei mō ngā kaipupuru raihana*

In addition, Waikato DHB **recommends** that Council commits to the following via the draft Plan:

- An FTE role be established at Council to provide guidance and administrative support for community transport providers regionally. This role will help ensure:
  - Sustainability of community transport providers across the Waikato who enable access to essential services (both locally and at a distance i.e. Hamilton) for people in households with no other transport option
  - Support to develop enterprise models for community transport providers to enable sustainability and succession e.g. Tairua's model of providing transport services to Auckland airport at a market rate to help fund their health transport service.
  - Investigate and implement procurement opportunities for community transport providers that leverage off central and local government at scale procurement systems e.g. for lower cost procurement of community transport vehicles

- Progress a framework for continuity and further development of Waikato Community Transport Forum; and collaborative action on community wellbeing impacts/outcomes linked to community transport and Waikato Wellbeing goals.
- Advocacy and a Waikato voice for community transport services and systems at local, regional and central government levels.

The DHB **recommends** that Council funds this FTE via a general rate per household, and that Council includes in its rates a contribution per rateable property to support the operational grants for community transport provision that will be prioritised and administered with the support of the proposed new FTE.

Finally, the DHB **supports and recommends** continued Council involvement in, and support for, the Tokoroa Air Quality Working Group activities to promote and engage the local community to design and lead community air quality focused initiatives, which have clear links to local housing and heating, and health and wellbeing. This includes dedicated community education as well as science staff resources. Given the high rates of hospitalisation and premature mortality for people in South Waikato District linked to poor air quality, we believe that both are needed from Council to achieve the project partner's agreed desired outcomes.

### **Key information in support of proposals identified in the draft Plan and DHB submission points**

#### **Proposal 1: Protecting our biodiversity, Kia parea te rerenga rauropi, (Option 1)**

The DHB supports this proposal (option 1) because it recognises the innate human affinity (or inborn 'love, awe and respect') for nature and that for our physical and mental health and wellbeing we need the natural world to be thriving and healthy, and we need to interact with and experience healthy thriving nature in our daily lives.

In the 21st century 'health for all' has to be about not just the health of people but also about the health of other species and ecosystems, especially because for humans to thrive and be healthy we need the natural world around us to be flourishing and healthy.”

Health is committed to Wai Ora and the core kaupapa of Māori understanding that the health of nature and of people is entwined and interconnected.

The Toi Te Ora Public Health, Issues of Health and Wellbeing Population Survey 2020 reflects the Lakes DHB community views on a range of other public health topics. Relevant here is about 60% of Lakes DHB population were concerned about the loss of native species and just over three quarters of respondents (76%) said important or very important when asked 'how important is it to you to have regular experiences of nature for your health and wellbeing?'. The survey is available on the [Toi Te Ora website](#) .

#### **Proposal 2: Sustainable homes scheme, He kaupapa orangea whare (Option 1)**

Housing is a basic human right and key determinant of health and wellbeing. New Zealand-based research has shown that improving housing quality improves self-rated health and self-reported wheezing, reduces days off school and work, visits to general practitioners, and hospital admissions for respiratory conditions, and for children with asthma, it significantly reduced their symptoms, days off school, and healthcare visits.<sup>3</sup> With this mind, the DHB supports option 1 for the Council to borrow money to help households install sustainable improvements, and commend Council for showing leadership in identifying proposal 2 as part of its draft Plan.

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<sup>3</sup> Waikato DHB Position Statement: Housing (June 2018)

### *Housing quality and accessibility*

Overall housing quality in the Waikato region is low, with only 54% of homes built after 1980 when mandatory insulation regulations were enacted<sup>4</sup>. In some districts, quality is very low - for example only 17% of homes in South Waikato are adequately insulated.

Census data shows that 3.1% of all Waikato houses are always damp, and 19.6% are sometimes damp. The same results show that 4.6% of Waikato homes always have some mould and 13.5% of homes sometimes have mould. Homes in the Lakes DHB have similar rates as the Waikato. In terms of heating, 2.6% of homes have no heating, while 48.3% of homes now have a heat pump.

While having adequate heating, insulation and ventilation are important determinants of sustainable housing, all homes require continued investment in maintenance, repairs and upgrades. A lack of maintenance and the accompanying deterioration can prevent homes from performing their primary function of keeping its occupants warm, dry and safe. In situations of financial pressure or distress, maintaining a house can become a major burden and needed repairs become deferred or not undertaken at all.

Increased focus on housing condition is required outside of just heating and insulation. Housing does not meet the needs of the disabled and greater effort is needed to make sure homes meet universal design requirements. Unless action is taken, the housing needs of the young and elderly, Māori and Pasifika, the disabled and homeless are expected to increase across every part of the region over the next 25 years. There are opportunities to work together and draw on our diverse expertise and mātauranga Māori, to help ensure that existing homes, especially rental stock meet quality and accessibility standards and sustainability improvements are made to meet the diverse needs of our Waikato communities.

### *Whare Ora and Home quality standards*

The 2018 census found there is more mould in rented (56 percent) than owned homes (44 percent). Programmes such as the DHB's Whare Ora (Waikato's Healthy Housing programme) can assist whānau and families to improve the quality of housing. In 2018 the programme assisted over 760 whanau to improve living conditions in their home.

Home quality measures such as Homestar and Homefit create a benchmark of housing quality across the region. Other councils such as the Hutt City Council have included Homefit on the LIM. There is an opportunity for greater use of such systems in the Waikato, and we would encourage Waikato Regional Council to advocate for and support this via its sustainable housing proposal.

### *Air quality and housing*

Poor air quality in Waikato, outside of Hamilton, is largely a result of domestic heating sources (older wood burners). Associated health effects range from respiratory irritation to heart problems, lung cancer, and premature deaths<sup>5</sup>. People with pre-existing conditions (e.g. asthma), young children, and older adults are more vulnerable and at higher risk of experiencing health effects. As an example, in South Waikato there were an estimated 44.8 cases per 100,000 people of premature mortality, and 14.8 per 100,000 cases of respiratory hospitalisations linked to poor air quality (2016) (the highest rates of any District across the Waikato region).

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<sup>4</sup> Waikato Plan Housing Quality Working Group work plan (December 2020)

<sup>5</sup> [EHINZ](#): Map showing the health effects of air pollution by District and key indicators

## *Waikato wellbeing goals and eliminating health inequities*

To conclude, The Waikato Plan has identified housing as one of its regional priorities. The DHB commends Council in demonstrating regional leadership in adopting this sustainable housing proposal, and we support this being an organisation also of regional scale. As you have identified, this proposal also aligns well with key Waikato Wellbeing project goals linked to sustainable cities and communities, climate action, reduced inequalities, and good health and wellbeing. The latter are of particular importance given their impacts on rates of illness and inequities.

In New Zealand the persistent health equity gap between Māori and non-Māori is greater than that between wealthy and poor, and can be seen in almost every health and wellbeing measure available. The equity gaps results in differences in health outcomes which are not only avoidable, but unfair and unjust<sup>6</sup>.

### **Proposal 4: Passenger rail service, He tēreina pāhihi (Option 1).**

Land transport infrastructure and services enable efficient and safe access to services and promote economic development. The recently introduced Te Huia rail service (connecting Hamilton and Auckland) and associated infrastructure at Rotokauri and Huntly are examples of this.

Investing in public transport infrastructure that focuses on multi model networks to reduce the kilometres travelled by private vehicle and encourage more active forms of transport is an important objective for health and environmental sustainability.

Bearing this in mind, our organisation supports Council's transport direction in regard to passenger rail services. We support option 1 that will add an inter-peak service, extend the service further into Auckland, and purchase and refurbish more carriages as well as a locomotive. This will help increase opportunities for communities to access education, employment and other essential services (including health) as well as enabling future growth and development along the Greater Hamilton/Auckland corridor. This in turn helps improve liveability and wellbeing and connections for communities.

The DHB notes that Council's identified commitment under public transport levels of service that "We will expand public transport to include more areas within our region enabling greater access to essential services, education, employment and social opportunities." We support this passenger rail option (option 1).

Waikato DHB has a strong interest in land transport policy and planning in relation to access to essential services, road safety; physical activity and mobility; accessibility and connectivity, air quality and environmental sustainability<sup>7</sup>.

### *Community transport and access to essential services*

The DHB has a specific interest in strategy and community transport service activity linked 'Transport Connections'. Community transport providers offer transport to those in need where no other suitable public transport option exists. This could include transport for health, education or social reasons. The Waikato region has a growing elderly population (a demographic that disproportionately relies on others for transport), therefore there is increasing pressure in health and transport services. Community transport providers are a lifeline for our small town and rural populations, ensuring that people are able to continue living in their community and still access the services they require.

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<sup>6</sup> Rapua Te Ara Matua, Waikato DHB Equity Report (March 2021)

<sup>7</sup> Waikato DHB Position Statement: Land transport (July 2018)

We part-fund up to 20 community health transport services from towns such as Coromandel in the north to Tokoroa and Taumarunui in the south (the latter includes the Taumarunui/Hamilton daily return bus service). These services enable access to health services for those with no other options, including to specialist health services located in Hamilton.

Transport investment decisions play a large role in our transport choices and impacts every aspect of our lives. The current land transport funding framework (Land Transport Management Act) privileges some land transport modes and activities. Although, community transport services play a key role in regard to improving access to essential service for rural communities in particular, these services are not recognised under this framework. While the DHB is prepared to continue to help fund health transport services, there is wider benefit in broader funding support for community transport services that Waikato Regional Council needs to consider.

Community Waikato, with in-kind support from the DHB and Waikato Regional Council, has facilitated the Waikato Community Transport Forum for the past 13 years. This forum provides invaluable support on capacity building regarding Waka Kotahi and DHB requirements, and advocacy for improvements, community trust financial management advice, and bookings management improvements. This forum represents the 28 community transport providers across our region. Community Waikato is currently administering this forum, including its website [www.waikatocommunitytransport.org.nz](http://www.waikatocommunitytransport.org.nz). While it has provided invaluable support to many community transport providers, Community Waikato doesn't have the capacity to meet the growing demand for different supports needed across all community transport providers across the region.

The DHB's position on community transport services in this submission aligns strongly with Council's identified strategic priority (2020-30) goal under Transport Connections i.e. "People and communities are well connected to each other, essential services and opportunities such as recreation, education and employment". This goal in turn supports our submission on an FTE resource and support for community transport services across the Waikato. It also recognises the identified population growth and demographic changes (an identified regional assumption) occurring in parts of the Waikato i.e. population ageing and limited population growth or depopulation for many districts.

### *Vulnerable journeys*

Perceived and real danger from collisions with motor vehicles is one of the greatest barriers to active transport. Low levels of urban walking and cycling arise from transport policy that pays little attention to the safety of pedestrians, cyclists and other micro mobility users.

Pedestrians, cyclists and micro mobility users are vulnerable road users and impact speed is a significant factor in an injury event. Posted speed limits are considered one of the most significant factors in determining a driver's choice of speed. Therefore, we acknowledge Waikato Regional Council's commitment to improvement speed management as evidenced in the Draft Waikato Regional Land Transport Plan 2021.

Road trauma has significant costs for us all. Beyond the direct impacts on whānau, health and ACC are the two sectors that bear the burden of road trauma. Conversations with our Waikato Hospital theatre staff show that road trauma contributes between 20 and 30% of theatre time. We are beginning to better understand the true cost of road trauma to the DHB and to the wider community. A recent study published by Midland<sup>8</sup>Trauma System found cycling safety measures aren't keeping pace with many communities' desire to cycle or use micro mobility for all or part of their journey.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Midland refers to the following five DHBs: Waikato DHB, Taranaki DHB, Lakes DHB, Bay of Plenty DHB, and Tairāwhiti Hauora

<sup>9</sup> Singh N., Joe N., Amey J., Smith A., Christey G. Cycling-related injuries and cycling promotion: a trauma service perspective. NZMJ. Vol 132 No 1494:3May 2019. Accessed from <https://www.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/cycling-related-injuries-and-cycling-promotion-a-trauma-service-perspective>

Increasing the number of people walking and cycling in an area improves road safety, as motorists take more care when driving in these areas. More sustainable forms of transport development include investing in improving walking and cycling infrastructure, increasing access to bikes and investing in improving public transport options.

#### *Joint transport planning and activity*

In addition, the DHB notes for Council's information that it is working with Waikato Regional Council, and other organisations to develop a Travel Plan (Waikato Hospital focus) and is also developing a broader Transport and Access Plan (2021). These Plans are about improving safe access, particularly for the transport disadvantaged, and will take account of the intent of the recently completed Waikato Metro Spatial Plan, and Mass Transit Plan recently completed by iwi, central and local government and other organisations. The Travel Plan will also help provide data and evidence for funders and key partners to inform future actions and investment decisions.

As a further example of joint activity, the DHB is currently working alongside Waikato Regional Council and Hamilton City Council on opportunities to discuss options to help resolve the public transport network constraint at the Pembroke St stop adjacent to Waikato Hospital, and enable improved access and travel options to and from the Hospital campus.

#### **Proposal 7: Rates remission and postponement, Te whakahekenga, whakatārewatanga anō o ngā tāke Kaunihera (Option 1)**

Waikato DHB supports Council's preferred option for the proposal on rates remission and postponement (Option 1). We agree with your identification that this work will support community wellbeing by providing a greater level of support for those who require financial assistance. While unclear and difficult to quantify, we think it is likely that there are a greater number of households across the Waikato region experiencing financial pressures and hardship as a result of the impacts of COVID and think this rates remission and postponement proposal will assist.

#### **Conclusion**

As part of the continued response to COVID, the DHBs are working alongside key partners within and beyond the health sector, to ensure we protect and promote community health and wellbeing, for both people working in essential services and the wider community to reduce the impacts that COVID has had on the community thus far. The COVID vaccination programme is a key example of this. The DHB also see local government, and your Council in particular, as a key partner in protecting and promoting health and wellbeing in the Waikato.

The DHB broadly supports the intentions identified by Council in its draft Plan for the Waikato region to improve services and local community wellbeing. This in turn aligns well with our Health System Plan goals. The Health System Plan includes a commitment to improve community health and wellbeing by working in partnership with iwi and alongside sectors such as local government that play a key role in determining community wellbeing outcomes.

We wish to be heard in support of this submission at the Hearings. If possible, we would like to present either immediately before or immediately after Community Waikato given our shared interest and involvement in community transport connections activity.

Naku iti noa, na



Dr Richard Wall  
Medical Officer of Health



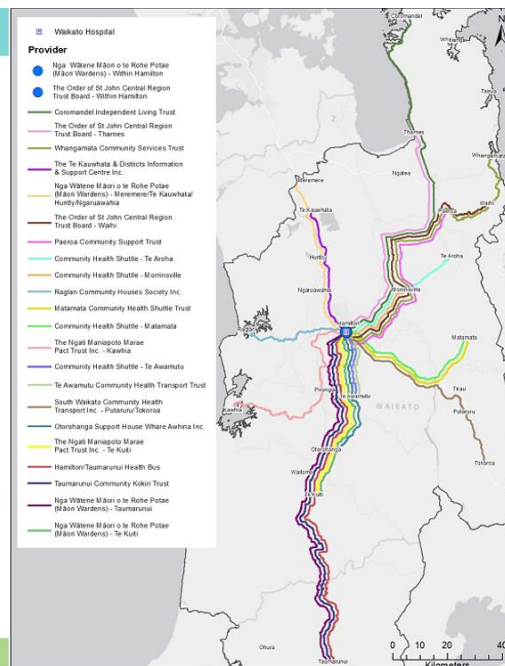
Regan Webb  
Director Strategy Investment and Transformation

## DHB Transport and Access Plan

- 6 focus areas agreed by DHB Commissioners as a framework for the Plan
  - Access and accessibility for rural communities
  - Consumer travel and appointment bookings system
  - Parking management and accessibility on the Waikato Hospital campus
  - Transport choices to and from Waikato Hospital
  - Staff travel between key DHB facilities in Hamilton
  - Working with key partners to enable effective responses
  
- DHB Travel Plan technical component (focus on Waikato Hospital) will direct actions under many focus areas (March - June 2021)
  
- Plan to be completed by August 2021

## DHB health transport services

- 20 DHB part-funded community based providers (see map)
  
- Taumarunui/Hamilton Health Bus
  
- Renal health shuttles
  
- Costs:
  - Community health transport (\$353K/annum)
  - Health Bus (\$210K/annum)
  - Renal transport (\$195K/annum)





## Wider transport work

- Founding member with Community Waikato and WRC of Community Transport Forum
- Increasing demand for travel and need to look at travel between localities/DHBs/Waikato hospitals
- Community health transport improvements
  - Māori wardens (new) –Greater Hamilton and North Waikato, and Southwest Waikato
- Waikato Hospital Travel Plan (co-funded)
  - Surveys with key groups travelling to/from the hospital
  - ~1400 staff living within 3km (2019)
  - Recommendations will guide actions and investment for transport/parking and accessibility improvements



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## National Travel Assistance

- Ministry of Health policy for reimbursement of travel and accommodation expenses (subject to meeting set national criteria).  
<https://www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-system/claims-provider-payments-and-entitlements/national-travel-assistance>
- Understated figures for 2019/20 given impacts of COVID
- Travel reimbursements for Waikato domiciled consumers accessing services within and beyond our DHB (2019/20): \$993K
- Accommodation reimbursements: \$517K

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