

# Report to Regional Connections Committee

**Date:** 9 September 2021

**Author:** Andrew Wilson, Manager Public Transport

**Authoriser:** Mark Tamura, Director Regional Transport Connections

**Subject:** **Community Transport Update**

**Section:** A (Committee has delegated authority to make decision)

---

## Purpose

1. To provide an update on community transport initiatives.

## Executive Summary

2. 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. They are a lifeline for our regional population.
3. The sector is in a fragile state and is in need of additional support to ensure continuation of existing initiatives and establishment of new initiatives where there is community need.
4. In partnership with Community Waikato, Trust Waikato and others, Waikato Regional Council will:
  - Recruit a dedicated regional coordination resource (1 FTE) for the purposes of:
    - Better supporting existing community transport providers
    - Encouraging the formation of new community transport initiatives where there is community need and a lack of transport options
    - Partner with and work across multiple organisations to develop shared transport solutions
  - Investigate establishment of a regional grant funding framework to enhance the viability of community transport initiatives
  - Procure, implement, and support a region wide transport coordination tool that transport providers can choose to adopt and make transport options more visible to potential users.
5. This report outlines the scope and context for the above initiatives.

### Staff Recommendation:

1. That the report Community Transport Update (Regional Connections Committee, 17 September 2021) be received.

## Background

6. About 180,000 people live within the region's smaller towns and rural areas. Yet major health, employment, education, and social services are concentrated in larger urban centres such as Hamilton, Thames, and Taupo.

7. For most people living in smaller towns and rural areas there is a need to travel long distances to access essential services. For many people this is a significant challenge and can have life changing implications. Isolation and inability to participate in society is most acute for people who:
  - have limited or no access to an independent means of transport
  - live rurally
  - have a disability
8. The number of people within our region that identify with one or more of the above factors is set to grow significantly in the coming years. This is primarily due to population ageing. By 2043 the number of people within the Waikato region aged over 65 will more than double to 130,000. With ageing comes:
  - an increased proportion of people with disability
  - lower rates of independent mobility (more people being unable to drive a car).
  - lower household incomes resulting in less ability to pay for things such as transport
9. Many people in towns and rural areas are priced out of relocation to the larger centres, where more comprehensive support services are centred.

### Council's Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP)

10. The RPTP recognises that no organisation on its own can fully meet transport needs on a region wide basis. This can only be achieved via partnerships across multiple organisations and better coordination of funding and delivery of transport solutions.
11. The RPRP sets out a policy framework for better supporting community transport initiatives. The policy framework was informed by a study looking at the effectiveness of community transport initiatives as means of overcoming transport challenges.
12. The study also demonstrated the investment in community transport initiatives can generate high benefit to cost ratios in excess of 10 to 1.
13. High benefit to cost ratios is possible due to:
  - relatively low costs associated with provision of community transport initiatives (volunteer organisations)
  - the significant benefits community transport initiatives can generate through reducing isolation, enabling access to healthcare, education, and social opportunities.

### Community Transport & Transport Providers

14. Community transport describes transport initiatives that are established, funded, and operated independently by community entities that typically rely on volunteers and fundraising.
15. 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.
16. The providers are a lifeline for our regional population, ensuring that people can continue living in rural areas and regional towns, and still access the services they require.
17. There are a wide range of community transport providers operating throughout the Waikato. A summary of many (but not all) community transport providers in the Waikato can be found at [Waikato Community Transport Forum](#) website.

18. Community Waikato facilitates a community transport forum four times a year to share information, discuss good practices, create guidelines and policies and advocate for community transport provision so that people have transport options wherever they live.
19. Community Waikato has unique insights into transport challenges and opportunities facing regional communities and community transport providers. Sarah Gibb from Community Waikato spoke at the last regionally focused Committee meeting (March 2021) and shared her insights.
20. The sector can be summarised as being in a fragile state and being in need of additional support to ensure the continuation of existing initiatives and establishment of new initiatives where there is community need.
21. This was further reinforced by submissions received from a number of community transport providers on Waikato Regional Council's draft LTP.
22. Submitters pointed out that council has policies to support community transport initiatives but to date has failed to enact those policies. Submitters specifically requested that Waikato Regional Council:
  - Establish a full time dedicated regional coordination resource to work with and support the community transport entities throughout the region
  - Establish an annual operating grants fund to enhance the viability of community transport services and supplement other fundraising activities. Submitters proposed that the value of the grants fund should be in the order of \$200,000 per annum, equivalent to about \$1 per rateable unit within the region.
23. Submitters anticipate the operational grant funding could be administered through the regional coordination FTE.

#### Waikato Regional Council LTP Decisions:

24. Funding was confirmed for a regional coordination resource (1 FTE) from year two of the LTP period. The purpose of the roles is to:
  - Better support existing community transport providers
  - Encourage the formation of new community transport initiatives where there is community need and a lack of transport options
  - Partner with and work across multiple organisations to develop shared transport solutions
25. The LTP deliberations report acknowledged the important contribution community transport makes and signalled an intent to investigate a potential grant funding framework in partnership with the Community Waikato and community transport providers.
26. The report also noted the any decision to fund the framework or otherwise would need to be made as part of future annual plan process.
27. Council staff are aiming to develop and recommend a regional grant funding framework in partnership with Community Waikato and community Transport Providers that:
  - Prioritises funding to benefit people of greatest need in an accordance with RPTP policy.
  - Ensures grant funding can be allocated fairly amongst eligible community providers on a region wide basis.
  - Ensure the grant funding supplements but does not fully fund the cost of providing community transport services, so as to preserve the independence and autonomy of community transport providers.

- Ensures the total value of the annual grant funding is capped at the equivalent of \$1 per rateable unit within the Waikato Region.
- Ensure compliance with all relevant legislation.

28. Once developed, implementation or otherwise of the framework would need to be considered as part of future annual plan process and may need to be the subject of public consultation.

## Trust Waikato Support

29. A funding application was also made to Trust Waikato to:

- Bring forward the establishment of the regional coordination resource (1 FTE)
- Establish and region wide transport coordination platform

30. Trust Waikato approved the funding request and work is now underway to recruit the regional coordination resource and confirm requirements and a tender process for transport coordination platform.

## Transport Coordination Platform

31. With the funding from Trust Waikato, council will procure, implement, and support a digital coordination tool that multiple organisations can adopt to enable them to act as transport providers using their existing fleets (refer to Attachment 1 for a platform overview).

32. The platform will enable people to view multiple transport options across a range of providers and choose a solution that best meets their needs. They would be able to do this via a web device, or via Waikato Regional Council's existing public transport call centre or via any approved organisation (such as a community transport group).

33. The platform will be able to accommodate a range of different operating models across a range of transport providers. This is essential in relation to preserving the ability of community groups and transport providers to self-organise and develop transport initiatives that meet their needs.

34. As a minimum council will pilot the platform with a demand responsive community transport service (to be delivered by council) within the Waikato Region.

35. Council will work to include existing independent transport providers within the initial phases of the pilot to test the ability of the platform to accommodate different providers and operating models at the same time.

## **Conclusion**

36. There is evidence that demonstrates that investing in community transport initiatives is a low cost yet highly effective way of overcoming transport challenges regionally. Better supporting community transport initiatives can be seen as an extension of council's public transport programme and is consistent with policy already established within the Councils Regional Public Transport Plan.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Digital Coordination Platform Overview

Attachment 1 – Digital Coordination Platform Overview

# Components



## Coordination Platform



Customer App



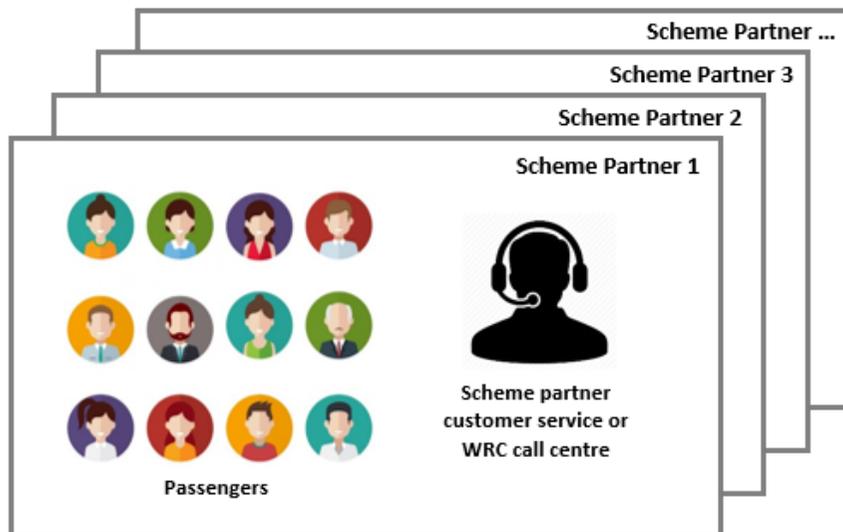
Customer Service Interface



Operations Interface



Driver Interface



WRC Administration



Vehicles and drivers across multiple organisations and entities