



Regional Public Transport Plan for Northland

2021-2031

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Foreword

Welcome to the 2021–2031 Regional Public Transport Plan for Northland.

This document sets out Northland Regional Council's strategy for passenger transport across the region over the next ten years. It also provides high-level information on national planning processes to help readers understand what council must do to implement and manage transport services in Northland, and highlights some of the national objectives council must meet.

This plan has been revised and updated from the 2018–2028 plan. Though the 2021 plan's vision spans a decade, most of the work will happen in the next three years. More work will be done during the life of this plan to incorporate the growth and spatial planning that the Far North, Kaipara and Whangārei district councils are doing. Council will also more fully develop the new benefit measurement framework for Northland and do more work on the benefits and measurements from the new investment measurement framework, as required by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (Waka Kotahi).

Te Taitokerau is one of the fastest-growing regions of New Zealand, and it's also the most rural – approximately half of Northland's population live in rural areas. This poses a unique set of challenges and opportunities, which have been heightened by the ongoing pandemic. This document has been prepared without knowing the full financial impacts of COVID-19 on public passenger transport services.

Since the 2018–2028 Regional Public Transport Plan, council has introduced a new ticketing system on Whangārei's urban bus service, CityLink Whangārei. We continue to run trials of new services to satellite settlements, to find out what best suits our communities.

In this plan, our focus remains on maintaining quality, affordable services in uncertain times. We recognise the need for low-cost and regular public transport in rural areas, to provide access to social and economic opportunities. We're investigating options for a community vehicle trust model similar to the one operated by Environment Canterbury. Funding has been approved for a trial in the Far North and Kaipara.

At the other end of the scale, CityLink Whangārei requires an increase in trip frequency to help address congestion issues in Whangārei CBD, as most trips operating in morning and afternoon peak times are currently full.

While council makes every effort to understand the need for public transport in Northland, and where possible provide it, this depends heavily on national and local funding, and the public's ability to pay fares.

Thank you to the individuals and organisations who took the time to make submissions for this plan. Your input was closely noted and helped to shape our thinking as we work towards delivering affordable, quality public transport and a more connected region.

Karakia

He hōnore, he korōria ki te Atua

He maungārongo ki te whenua

He whakaaro pai ki ngā tāngata katoa

Hangā e te Atua he ngākau hou

Ki roto, ki tēnā, ki tēnā o mātou

Whakatōngia to wairua tapu

Hei awhina, Hei manaki, hei tohutohu i a matou

I runga i ngā huarahi, ngā ara puta noa te rohe,

Hei ako hoki i ngā mahi i ngā ra, ngā marama, ngā tau
e heke mai ana

Amine

Honour and glory to God

Peace on Earth

Goodwill to all people

Lord, develop a new heart

Inside all of us

Instil in us your sacred spirit

Help us, care for us, guide us

On our highways and roads across the region,

*In all the things we need to learn over the days, months
and years to come*

Amen

Mihi

Nō reira ka kohaina tēnei Rautaki Haerenga Waka ā Rohe 2021-2031 tuhinga hukihuki, arotake o nga tau e toru, ki ngā tōpito e whā o te rohe o Te Taitokerau hei hāpai i te ora o ngā iwi i runga i te ōhaki o te whakatauki:

Ki te kī mai koe ki au
He aha te mea nui o tenei ao?
Maku e ki atu,
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

Tenā koutou, tenā koutou, tenā tātou kātoa

Ngā pūtake o tēnei mahere – Te Rautaki haerenga waka a rohe e pa ana ki ngā take, ngā painga, ngā whāinga me ngā kaupapa matua.

Ka whakaratohia e te hōtaka mahere whenua he raupapa o ngā kaupapa nui mo te rohe, tae atu ki ngā putanga o te tukanga aromatawai, me to rātou tikanga mo te kaupapa matua.

Tihei mauri ora!

Northland Regional Council has the pleasure of distributing the Regional Public Transport Plan 2021-2031 to the far corners of Northland, to support the legacy of the following proverb:

*If you were to ask me
what is the greatest thing
in this world?
I will reply with
It is people, it is people, it is people.*

Greetings to you all.

This plan identifies the problems, benefits, objectives and priorities for Northland's land transport infrastructure and services.

It provides a list of the major land transport projects for the region, including the outcomes of the assessment process undertaken on each major roading project and their order of priority.

The breath and vitality of life!

Introduction



This is the Regional Public Transport Plan for Northland 2021 – 2031.

The Regional Public Transport Plan (plan) is a statutory document developed under Section 19 of the Land Transport Management Act 2003. It sets out how public transport, and discounted transport operators such as the Total Mobility scheme, are to be provided in Northland over the coming years.

The plan is prepared by Northland Regional Council (NRC) through its Regional Transport Committee, in close consultation with the Whangārei District Council, Far North District Council, Kaipara District Council and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, and replaces the last plan adopted in 2015.

This plan has been developed with the goal of introducing a nationally consistent structure for transport plans. We acknowledge the effort of the National Regional Transport Special Interest Group and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency in this regard.

The plan is set out in five parts:

Part 1: Strategic context

This describes:

- a profile of Northland;
- current public transport services operating in the region;
- drivers for public transport in the region; and
- the legal and wider policy framework this plan is written under.

Part 2: Strategic framework

This describes the:

- vision;
- objectives; and
- strategic direction for contracted units, total mobility and related council objectives, policies and methods.

Part 3: Investment priorities

This provides a statement of the region's ten-year transport priorities and the investment story over the short-to-medium term.

Part 4: Operating and funding public transport

This part of the plan describes:

- how the Public Transport Operating Model will apply in the Northland context;
- how this plan considers the needs of the transport-disadvantaged; and
- monitoring and review.

Part 5: Monitoring and review

This sets out how we will measure the efficiency and effectiveness of the provisions of the Regional Public Transport Plan.

The monitoring and reporting of key performance indicators (KPIs) for CityLink Whangārei are detailed in this section.

The measurable KPI for the remainder of the network is passenger numbers, with the objective of seeing an increase in patronage year on year. Obviously the COVID-19 environment has been challenging, but all services are showing a strong recovery at the time of writing this plan.

Finally, there are several appendices that include information on:

- compatibility with relevant national and regional plans and strategies;
- NRC's policy on significance, farebox recovery, special event transport funding, SuperGold Card scheme allocation, and community vehicle trusts;
- Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Investment Decision Making Framework, which is used to assess the region's application for funding assistance for public transport projects; and
- current fares and timetables for CityLink Whangārei, and the CityLink Whangārei improvement programme.

Part 1: Strategic context

Our region

Northland is known as “the birthplace of the nation” in recognition of its historic and cultural importance. It is also renowned for its national icons, such as ancient kauri forests and its scenic and accessible coastline (a national treasure), sheltered harbours, many offshore islands and ecosystems of important conservation value.

Northland is a long, narrow peninsula with a subtropical climate, the mildest of any New Zealand region. It has a land area of 13,286 square kilometres (including freshwater bodies) and 3,200km of coastline, with 14 major harbours, including the Kaipara Harbour (the largest harbour in the Southern Hemisphere), many smaller estuaries and long stretches of open, sandy coast.

From Cape Rēinga in the north to Te Hana in the south the region is 260 kilometres in length and has a number of natural and physical advantages, eg:

- strong tourism potential with popular beaches, heritage attractions, a warm climate and safe harbours;
- strong economic potential around rural-based manufacturing industry and pastoral farming; and
- forestry and fishing, as well as New Zealand's only oil refinery, two large dairy factories, a large cement factory at Portland and wood-processing facilities around the region.

The region is growing in popularity as a place to live and as a holiday destination due to its outstanding natural environment, warm climate, low population density, and proximity to Auckland.

Northland is a diverse region in both socio-economic patterns and environmental characteristics. It has one regional council – Northland Regional Council – and three district councils: Kaipara, Far North and Whangārei.

The region has a population of approximately 194,600, ranking it eighth in population size out of the 16 regions in New Zealand. Whangārei is by far the largest centre with a population of around 54,400 in 2020, or about 28% of the region's population. Other urban centres include Kerikeri, Kaikohe, Kaitiā and Dargaville, all containing populations fewer than 10,000 people.

Much of the region is characterised by large rural hinterlands, dispersed travel patterns, and relatively low population densities. Northland is the most rural region in New Zealand, in respect to the proportion of the population living outside urban areas. This pattern of development presents a different set of challenges when considering the provision of public transport.

Our people

Our population continues to grow and is estimated at 194,600 (at June 2020). Over the seven-year period from 2013 to 2020, Northland's population increased by 29,900, equivalent to a growth rate of 2.4% per annum, above the national rate of 1.9%.

Population growth has been strongest in the southern and eastern parts of the region. Since 2013, only the Bay of Plenty region (2.7%) has experienced a faster population growth than Northland, as shown in the table below.

District	Estimated residential population as at 30 June 2020	Percentage of Northland's total population	Population increase 2013 - 2020
Far North	71,000	36%	10,400
Kaipara	25,200	13%	4,700
Whangārei	98,300	51%	14,600

Around 50% of the Northland population live in rural areas, compared to just 10% of the national population. The population of urban areas in Northland grew by 11,000 (2.1% per annum) between 2013 and 2019, while the population of rural areas (including rural settlements) grew by 13,000 (2.5% per annum).

Much of the growth has been on the fringes of the urban areas in low density developments such as rural residential and lifestyle blocks.

Northland has a different ethnic composition compared to the rest of New Zealand. Approximately 36% of Northlanders identify themselves as Māori compared to 17% nationally; only in the Gisborne region does a higher proportion of the population identify itself as Māori (53%). Those of Asian ethnicity make-up 15% of the national population, but represent just 3% of the Northland population.

The number of people over 65 years of age living in Northland is increasing. The number of Northlanders aged 65 years and over has increased from 28,900 in 2013 to 39,300 in 2020, an average annual increase of 4.5% compared to the total Northland population increase of 2.4% per annum. People aged over 65 years now account for 20% of the Northland population compared to just 12% in 1996.

There has also been a large increase in the Northland population aged 15–39 years between 2013 and 2020. In the seven years prior to 2013, the Northland population in this age group fell by 600. In the current seven-year period it has increased by 9,900, accounting for one-third of the population increase.

In 2018, 11% of Northlanders reported that they had 'not enough' money to meet their everyday needs for things such as accommodation, food, clothing and other necessities. This compares with the national average of 10% and is the second-highest among the regions for which the data is available. Relatively low wages and salaries, and a high proportion of over 65-year-olds may explain this.

The population of Northland is projected to increase from 194,600 in 2020 to 217,000 in 2031 (assuming an average annual growth of 1% per annum over the period). Almost 50% of the projected population increase is expected to be people of Māori ethnicity. By 2031, Māori are projected to account for around 40% of the total Northland population. The vast majority (92%) of the projected population increase out to 2031 is expected to occur in the 65 years and over age group. The number of Northlanders in this age bracket is projected to increase from 39,300 in 2020 to 56,200 in 2031, an average annual increase of 3.3%, which is similar to the projections for New Zealand generally.

Our economy

Northland has a diverse economy. Manufacturing (including Refining New Zealand at Marsden Point) is the largest level-one industry in the region, accounting for approximately 16% of Northland's gross domestic product (GDP) and valued at \$8.5 billion in the year ended March 2020 (compared to 10% nationally). The primary sector (agriculture, forestry, mining and fishing) contributes about 10% (compared to 5% nationally), followed by rental, hiring and real estate services and health care and social assistance (both 7%).

The Northland economy, as measured by GDP, is estimated to have grown by 1.5% in the year ended March 2020 to \$8.5 billion. This is similar to the national GDP growth rate of 1.6% in 2020. There has been a steady rise in Northland's GDP growth rate in the decade following the global financial crisis, with an average annual growth rate of 2.9% from 2015 to 2020 compared to 2.1% during the years 2010 to 2015.

Growth has been very broad-based over the past five years, with construction, private sector dominated services, manufacturing and primary industries all making a strong contribution. Over recent years, Northland has experienced record levels of dairy and avocado production, forestry harvest and tourism activity (guest nights and expenditure). This contrasts with the previous five-year period, where economic activity in the construction sector reduced, and where manufacturing and primary industries contributed most to growth.

In the year ended March 2020 there were 76,175 filled jobs (both employed and self-employed) in Northland. This is 11,460 more than in 2010, representing an 18% increase during the ten-year period. However, this increase has not been even across the years, with the number of filled jobs falling by 959 between 2010 and 2013 before increasing by 12,419 since then.

This rise in employment has not been even across the various sectors. During the ten-year period from 2010 to 2020, an additional 3,800 jobs have been created within public sector dominated services, with a positive increase during both five-year periods and accounting for one-third of the total employment increase for the period. Conversely there are large swings in filled jobs in the other four broad sectors (primary sector, manufacturing, construction and infrastructure, and private sector dominated services). For the first three sectors, employment decreased in 2010–15 before rising in 2015–20, while the reverse has occurred for the private sector dominated services. Almost 42% of filled jobs in Northland are in the private sector dominated services sector.

The annual average unemployment rate in Northland was 4.7% in the year ended December 2020. Between 2009 and 2016, Northland's unemployment rate held relatively steady within the 8-9% range. The current level of unemployment is not too far above the regional record low of 4.2% set in 2007.

Unemployment has declined in all regions since 2012, except Taranaki where it has risen from 4.4% to 4.7%.

Northland has the third highest unemployment rate of the 12 regions for which it is calculated, with Gisborne/Hawke's Bay (5.7%) and Bay of Plenty (5.1%) now recording higher rates. The combined Tasman/Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast region has the lowest rate (3.3%).

In December 2020, the annual average unemployment rate for Māori in Northland was 7.6% compared to 3.5% for European. Unemployment rates for both Māori and European remained relatively constant for the period 2009-2016, averaging 17% for Māori and 6% for European. The national Māori unemployment rate is 8.3%.

Our public transport services

BusLink

NRC provides several passenger transport services to help residents and visitors get around the region.

These services make up the current continuous programme of services, and include the following.



CityLink Whangārei

CityLink Whangārei is the region's largest bus service and operates entirely within urban Whangārei.

Features of CityLink

- CityLink consists of seven routes, operating on weekdays from as early as 6.00am until as late as 6.00pm on some routes, and from 7.00am until 5.00pm on Saturday. No services operate on Sundays or public holidays.
- The buses in use are low-floor models, which assist in meeting the needs of mobility-restricted patrons. In late 2020, the existing fleet was replaced with new buses fitted with low-emission Euro 5 engines. These meet Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's current requirements for urban buses in New Zealand.
- CityLink presently operates on a flat-fare system (customers are charged a standard fare for each trip). SuperGold Card holders can travel for free under the scheme between 9.00am and 3.00pm Monday to Friday and anytime on Saturday.
- In early 2020, CityLink replaced its existing smartcard with a new ticketing system known as the Bee Card. The Bee Card can be obtained either online (www.beecard.co.nz) or at the Rose Street bus terminus office. All SuperGold Card holders are required by the government to obtain a Bee Card loaded with the SuperGold Card scheme concession fare, in order to travel for free during the eligible times.
- Appendix 3 includes full details on current fares and timetables.

CityLink patronage

Passenger numbers have more than quadrupled, from 80,000 during CityLink's first year in 2000/01 to more than 329,000 passengers in 2020/21. Factors influencing this growth include changes made to bus routes and extended weekend operating hours. In addition, rising motoring costs (ie. fuel prices) has been known to help increased passenger transport usage.

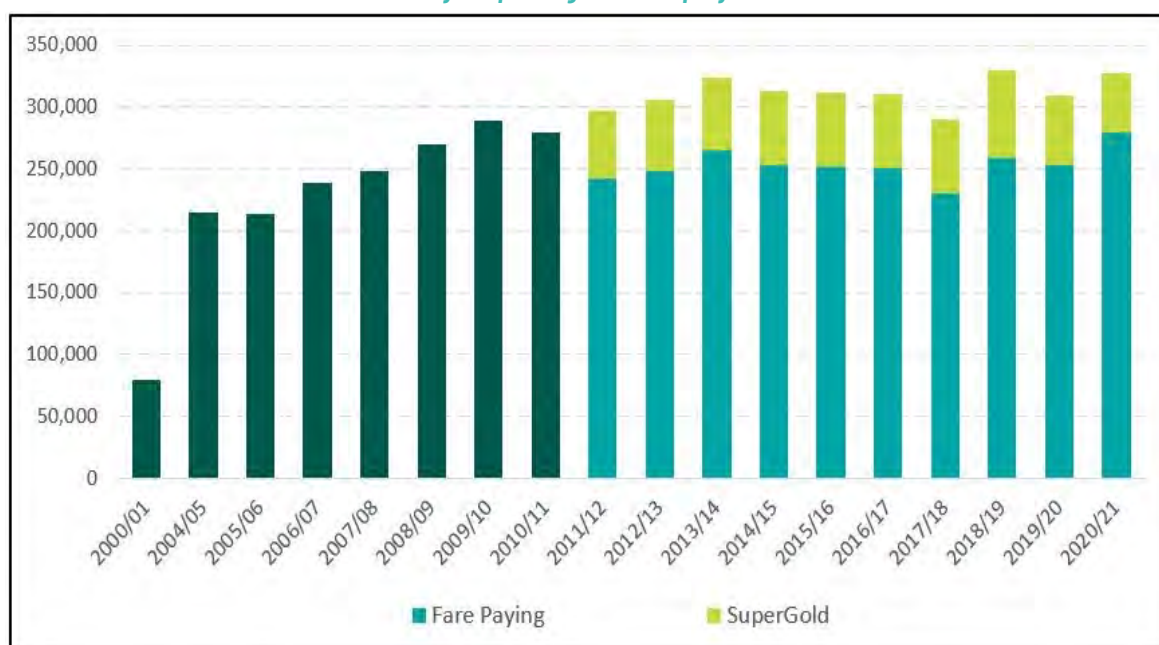
However, patronage has been largely static over the past four to five years, as trips have now reached capacity levels on some routes.

CityLink infrastructure

The on-road infrastructure to support CityLink services is provided by Whangārei District Council (WDC). WDC is currently committing (in the 2018-2021 period) between \$100,000 and \$160,000 per annum to maintain existing shelters and build new shelters. This excludes expenditure on the main bus terminus at Rose Street, which has been declining in condition for some years. This area is no longer fit for purpose for several reasons, including the introduction of additional peak vehicles needed to meet demand, and insufficient weather cover and seating. Access to neighbouring facilities and services is also hampered by not having pedestrian crossings nearby.

Work has commenced on planning to upgrade the area in conjunction with WDC's City Centre Plan. Design options have been commissioned and are being evaluated at the time of writing. Work is scheduled to be completed in 2021/22.

CityLink passengers carried per year



CITYlink WHANGAREI

NO SERVICES
ON SUNDAYS
& PUBLIC
HOLIDAYS

ROSE ST
TERMINUS

BUS ROUTE KEY

- Onerahi 2
- Kamo & Tikipunga 3 & 3A
- Otangarei 4
- Raumanga & Morningside 5 & 5A
- Maunu 6
- Fairway Drive 7
- Southern Express 8



Far North Link

Far North Link (formerly BusAbout Kaitaia) is currently operated by the Community, Business and Environment Centre (CBEC). CBEC is a community enterprise operating a range of businesses and environmental programmes and is contracted to council to operate the bus service. Originally established by CBEC with funding from the Ministry for the Environment's Sustainable Management Fund, Far North Link is now subsidised by council (through a district-wide targeted transport rate) and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (through the National Land Transport Fund).

The daily service covers the Far North in and around Kaitaia, including Doubtless Bay and Ahipara, with a once-a-week service to Pukenui. Patronage has fluctuated over the years, and the service has been rationalised to remove unsupported trips. Far North Link can now offer access to free off-peak travel for SuperGold Card holders in the area and has seen a small increase in support over the past two years.

Fares range from \$2.00 to \$5.00 for a one way trip, with student fares, and ten trip concession tickets available. Full timetable information can be found at: www.buslink.co.nz

Far North Link passengers per year



Mid North Link

This trial service was introduced on 1 December 2016, initially in response to a request from the public through NRC's 2015-2018 Long Term Plan consultation.

Mid North Link initially offered two workers' services, operating seven days a week, between Kaikohe and Kerikeri, and Kaikohe and Paihia, and a once-a-week shopper service across the same routes. This was to try and increase access to seasonal employment opportunities on the east coast.

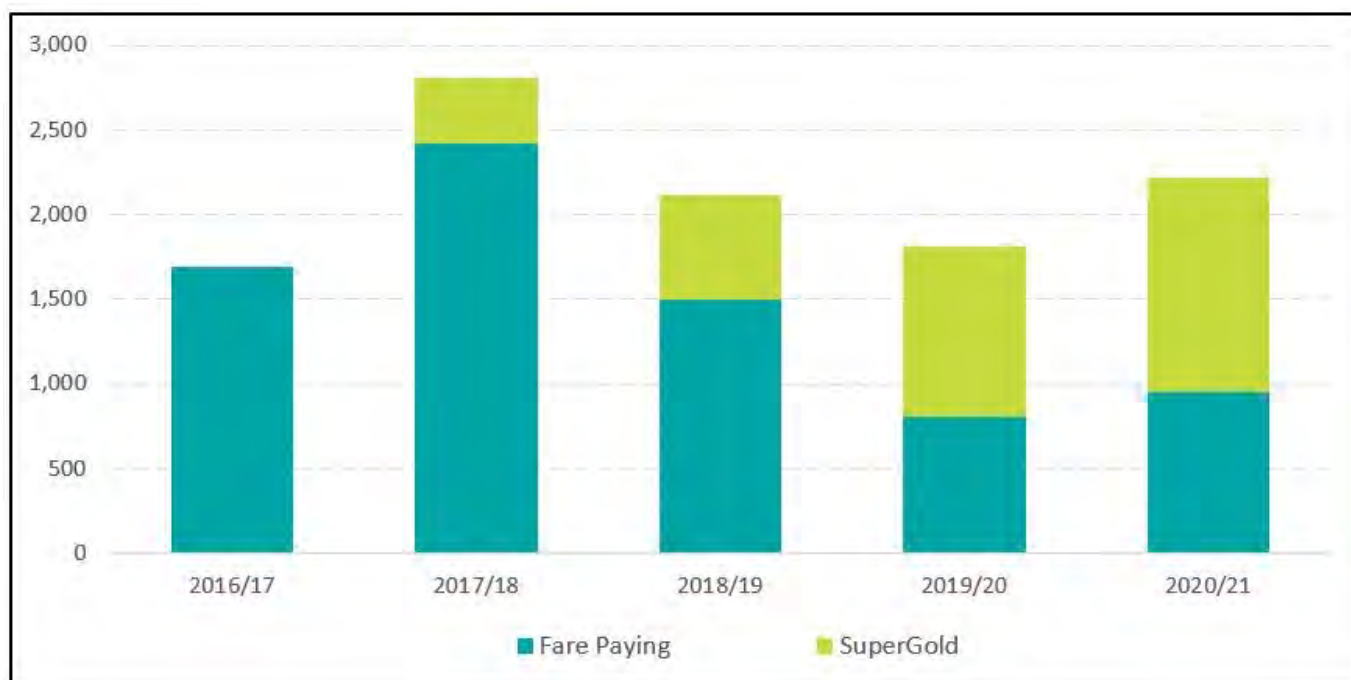
Due to a lack of patronage, understood to be primarily because of the long distance covered and long trip time, the service has been reduced to shopper trips only on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

This service attracts a subsidy from the National Land Transport Fund, and the local share is provided by NRC (through a district-wide targeted transport rate).

Mid North Link provides an important connection to services only found on the east coast (eg. optometrists and dentists), as well as enabling independent travellers arriving by inter-regional services to move around the Far North district.

Fares range from \$3.00 to \$8.50 per one way trip. Full timetable information can be found at: www.buslink.co.nz

Mid North Link passengers per year



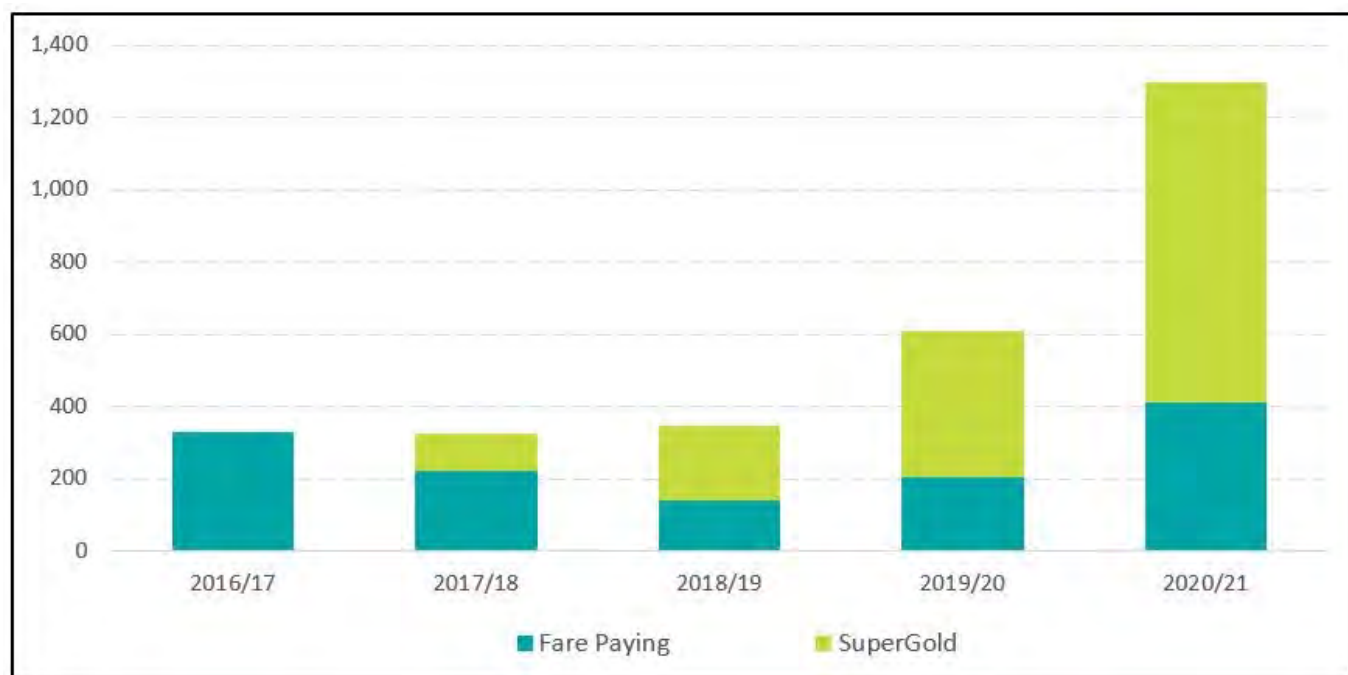
Hokianga Link

This trial service, requested by the community, commenced operation in 2015. The service operates three times a week (Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday), travelling from Opononi/Ōmāpere to access services in Kaikohe and Kerikeri (by connecting to the Mid North Link at Kaikohe). This service also attracts a

subsidy from the National Land Transport Fund, and the local share is provided by NRC through a district-wide targeted transport rate.

Fares range from \$6.00 - \$8.00 per one way trip. Full timetable information can be found at: www.buslink.co.nz

Hokianga Link passengers per year



Bream Bay Link

This once-a-week trial service commenced on 1 August 2019, again in response to public requests, and with funding support secured via NRC's 2018-2021 Long Term Plan.

The service operates between Kaiwaka and Whangārei via Waipū and Ruakākā.

The service utilises Rose Street bus terminus on its arrival (and departure) in Whangārei, allowing for connection with CityLink Whangārei services across Whangārei.

Fares range from \$5.00 to \$7.00 per one way trip. Full timetable information can be found at: www.buslink.co.nz

Bream Bay Link patronage



Hikurangi Link and Whangārei Heads Link

These trial services were introduced in November 2020 and operate weekly on a Thursday. All trial services take some months before passenger numbers begin to grow, and during the first month of operation, there has been an average of between two and six passengers per trip. Staff will monitor passenger numbers and may make minor timetable amendments throughout the 12-month trial period if required.

Contract details

Contract values, when they were awarded and when they are due to expire can be found at www.nrc.govt.nz/getting-around

NRC's application to include these trial services in Northland's continuous programme of works has been declined. In order to make this shift, Waka Kotahi

require business cases to be completed and submitted. The economic component of the business case process can make it difficult to attract ongoing subsidies, and in fact it has been noted that future subsidies for some of Northlands trial services may be limited.

It is hoped that the strong post-COVID recovery being shown in Northland will continue, and that more passengers will utilise the rural trial services – more passengers will mean a greater chance of securing future funding.

Infrastructure

Responsibility for the provision of bus stop infrastructure lies with the relevant district council. NRC will continue to work with the three district councils in this regard.



Total Mobility

The Total Mobility scheme provides subsidised fares to people who have an impairment, having lasted six months or more, that prevents them from undertaking any one or more of the following five components of a journey unaccompanied, on a bus, train or ferry in a safe and dignified manner:

1. getting to the place from where transport departs
2. getting onto the transport
3. riding securely
4. getting off the transport
5. getting to the destination.

Assistance is provided in several ways:

- an electronic swipe card is issued to eligible scheme members (who have been assessed by an approved agency). This card discounts the normal transport operator's fare by 50%, up to a maximum fare of \$30 (as set by council);
- contestable funding subsidies are available to approved transport operators, for the purchase and installation of a new wheelchair hoist. The current programme provides for up to one hoist installation per year;
- a per-lift payment to the owners of wheelchair-capable vehicles for each time the

hoist (or equivalent) is utilised by a scheme member. This is 100% funded by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.

The scheme is administered by NRC and funded by Whangārei District Council (40%) and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (60%). NRC applies for a set funding allocation from these bodies each year, based on anticipated demand. NRC has set a maximum subsidised fare level (up to 50% of the cost) across the Whangārei district, up to a maximum of \$30 per trip. Only those eligible clients aged 11 or older can receive this subsidy.

Although the scheme is currently limited to Whangārei, NRC will investigate all applications for Total Mobility services in Northland. It is important to note that implementing any new or extended service depends on the availability of national and local funding, and suitable transport operators.

In 2020, NRC commissioned a high-level investigation into the needs of the transport-disadvantaged in Northland. This investigation (*Transport needs in Northland: Final report. MRCagney (NZ) Ltd, Auckland, New Zealand*) highlighted specific areas in Northland where assistance will be most needed, and council will work with the relevant district council to address these needs where possible.

Total Mobility scheme patronage

Financial Year	No. of clients	No. of trips	Total scheme expenditure	Funding contribution
2013/2014	1,051	28,453	\$165,691	54% Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency 46% WDC
2014/2015	1,123	27,818	\$162,800	As above
2015/2016	1,095	27,571	\$162,250	As above
2016/2017	1,123	26,790	\$154,237	As above
2017/2018	1,355	31,781	\$179,164	60% Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency 40% WDC
2018/2019	1,504	34,883	\$215,502	As above
2019/2020	1,632	32,093	\$220,488	As above

Non-contracted transport services

There are several other services in Northland that are not contracted by council. Although the council has no direct involvement in these services, it does have an interest in ensuring they are maintained, as they contribute towards the core objectives of the council's Long Term Plan and the Regional Land Transport Plan. These are:

- Commercial operators – including InterCity – operate scheduled coach services into and around the region from Auckland. Through the InterCity network, Kaitiaki, Doubtless Bay and the Bay of Islands can be reached. Routes cover Whangārei and various settlements along SH1. In some instances, connections are available to other destinations through contracted services such as the Mid North Link, Hokianga Link and Far North Link.
- Te Wai Ora Coachlines in the Kaipara operate a weekly shuttle from Auckland to Dargaville and Whangārei on a Friday evening, returning on Sundays. Transport to Waipoua Forest and Opononi is also available.
- Te Wai Ora Coachlines also recently took over the operation of a non-contracted commercial bus service that serves communities between Dargaville and Whangārei. The Westcoaster offers two return trips a day for passengers and freight.
- School bus operators are currently run either on a commercial basis or under contract to the

Ministry of Education. There may also be opportunities for other fare-paying passengers to be accommodated on these services at the discretion of the school and/or operator, however, these services are generally fully loaded.

- Tour operators cater for tourists, through services that are non-scheduled and concentrated around peak season.
- The following ferry services operate in Northland:
 - passenger ferry in the Bay of Islands between Paihia and Russell;
 - passenger/vehicular ferry in the Bay of Islands between Ōpua and Ōkiato; and
 - passenger/vehicular ferry in the Hokianga between Rāwene and Kohukohu. This service is operated under contract to, and partially subsidised by, Far North District Council and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.

Full details of services operating in Northland, including health shuttles and other services available to the general public, can be found at www.nrc.govt.nz/gettingaround.

Key issues and opportunities for public transport in Northland

There are several changes likely to affect public transport over the short-to-medium (three to six) and longer term (30 years). The list below is not exhaustive, but reflects the foreseeable influences on public transport demand in the region.

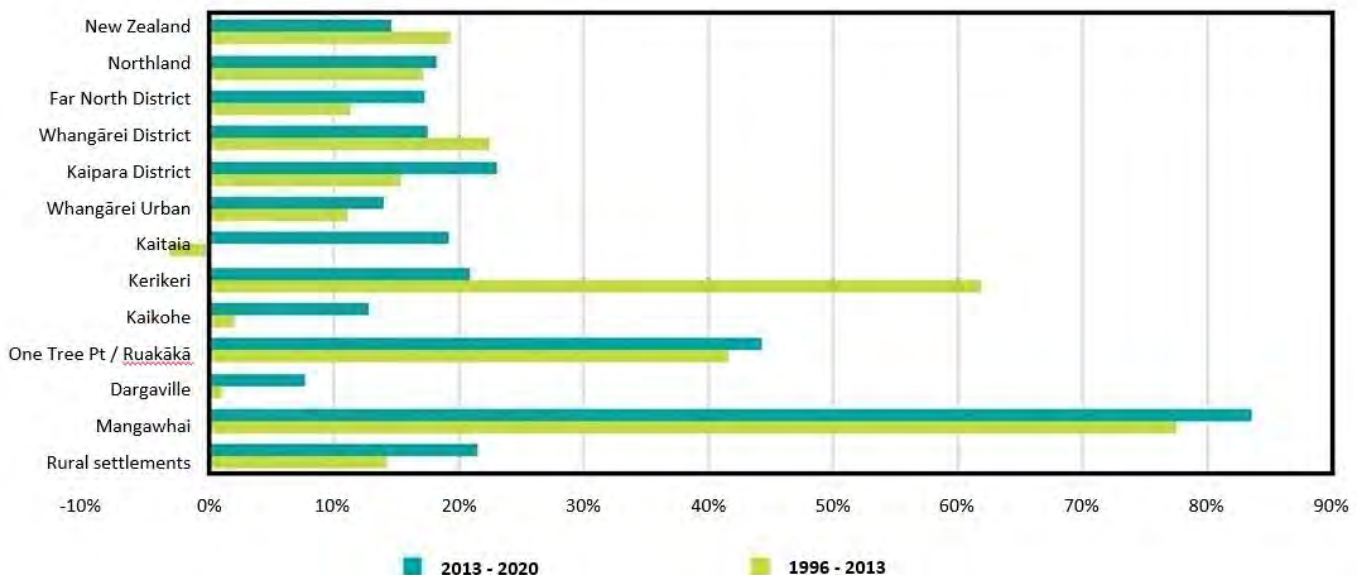
Population change

Northland's estimated residential population was 194,600 as at 30 June 2020. Since 2013, the region's population has increased by 2.4% per annum, well above the national increase of 1.9%. During the period 1996-2013, Northland's population grew by 0.9% per annum. During the last seven years, all three districts in the region have experienced similar population growth rates (within the range of 2.3-3%) and the population in rural and urban areas has grown by about 15,000.

The broad population age groups that have grown the fastest during the past seven years are those aged between 15-39 years and those aged 65 years and over. The increase for the latter age group is a long-running trend; the recent increase for the former is a reversal of previous growth patterns.

The figure below shows the total percentage population change in New Zealand, the Northland region and the three districts of Northland over two periods: the 17 years from 1996 to 2013, and the seven years from 2013 to 2020. It also shows rates of change for the Whangārei urban area, selected small urban areas, and the total population of rural settlements in Northland such as Awanui, Russell, Parua Bay and Ruawai.

Total change in population by selected area



Several important observations can be drawn from this figure, including:

- the percentage increase in population in Northland over the past seven years is greater than it had been in the preceding 17 years;
- the recent growth has been relatively evenly spread across the three districts: the populations of the Far North and Whangārei districts grew by 17%, and the Kaipara district grew 23%;
- most small towns in the region, including Kaitiāia, Kaikohe and Dargaville, have experienced a turnaround in their population growth, from falling or stagnant between 1996 and 2013 to growing in recent years;

- the population of Kerikeri continues to grow, but at a slightly slower pace. However, the small urban centres of One Tree Point / Ruakākā and Mangawhai have grown and continue to grow rapidly; and
- rural settlements have also experienced rapid population growth in recent years.

If the population of Northland grows at an average annual rate of 1% (which is closer to the pre-2013 average) over the next decade, the population will reach just over 217,500 in 2031. However, if it grows at 2% per annum (which is closer to current levels), Northland's population will reach over 240,000 by 2031. This would be 70% higher than the region's population in 2000. Historical trends suggest that future population growth will occur in both urban and rural areas.

Population growth helps to drive the need for an enhanced public transport offering both in Whangārei, which already has an established public transport network, and Kerikeri and possibly Ruakākā / Mangawhai / Mangawhai Heads, which do not.

Where the population is not growing or in decline, the region is faced with the difficult issue of meeting the continuing demand and need for public transport services with a declining rating base and inability to pay the local share. The issues of finding it difficult to meet the local share and the continued decline in rating take are further discussed below in relation to the issues of deprivation, ageing population and affordability.

It is particularly important to improve access to employment, education and recreational opportunities in regional centres (Whangārei, Kerikeri, Kaikohe, Dargaville and Kaitia) from outlying areas.

NRC has attempted to address this gap through the introduction of trial services such as the Mid North Link, Hokianga Link and Bream Bay Link, and ongoing funding of the Far North Link. In future, if we want to maintain the viability of living outside main centres, it will be important to retain services such as these.

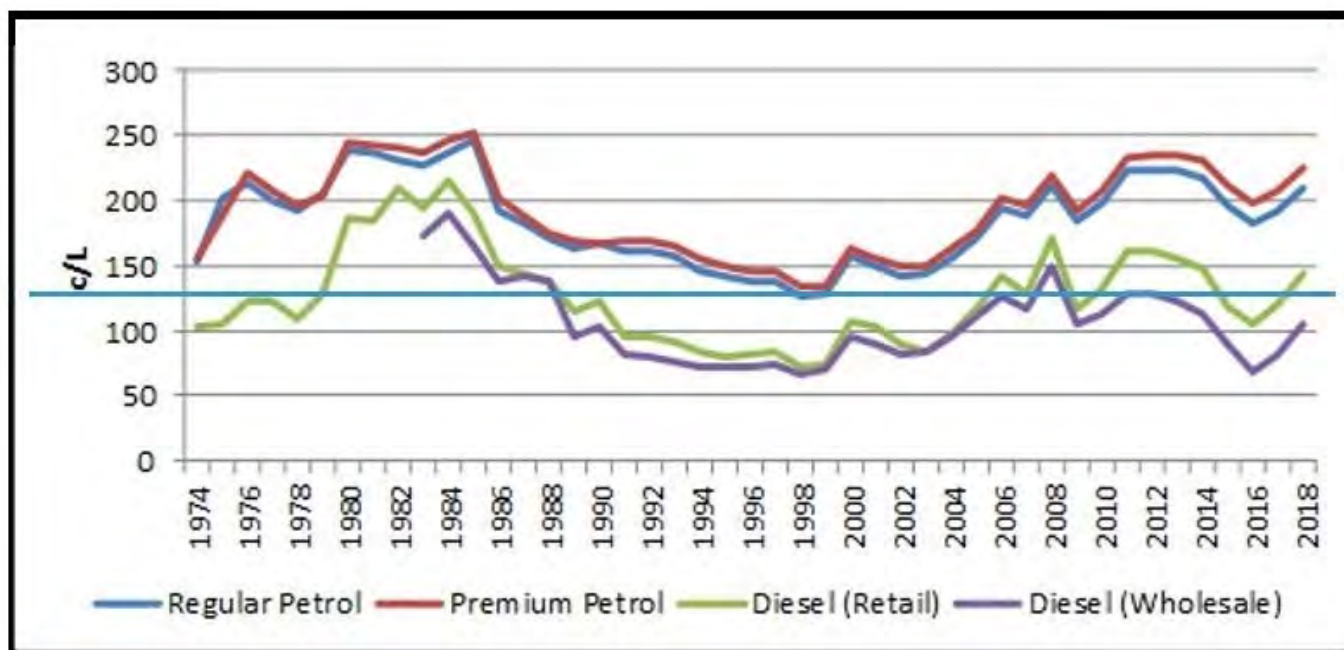
Fuel prices

Energy use in New Zealand is dominated by transport. The country relies on imported oil for almost half of its energy needs, making New Zealand vulnerable to international supply disruption and volatile oil prices.

The real price of oil has been subject to significant fluctuations in the past decade. Diesel prices have varied by as much as 50%. Supplies are not expected to suddenly run out but are likely to become more expensive as demand grows and production costs rise. Recent short-term trends have shown a decrease in prices due to a fall in demand caused by the economic impact of COVID-19. Despite recent falls, in real terms, current fuel prices are still higher than they were in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Forecasts indicate that in the medium term, oil prices are likely to rise as demand recovers, before increasing sharply beyond 2030 as accessible world supplies diminish.

Higher fuel prices will affect the affordability of using private cars for many people. Consequently, future fuel prices are likely to be an economic driver for the provision of public transport as a more affordable travel option. The increasing uptake of electric vehicles may provide both opportunities and some challenges for public transport in the future.

Petrol and Diesel Prices (real 2018)



Retail price of petrol and diesel (December 2019)



Deprivation

Northland has high rates of relative deprivation compared to other regions of New Zealand. Drawing on results from the 2018 census and more recent data, the following trends are apparent:

- Income has generally risen across Northland since 2015 due to a lift in economic activity; however, it still falls below the national average. As of 2020, the median household income in Northland is approximately 75% of the New Zealand median, and it has remained at this level for most of the decade since 2010. In this regard, the future ability of the community to pay the local share for infrastructure and public transport is an issue, as is the ability to pay public transport fares.
- Despite a recent drop, the unemployment rate in Northland is still higher than the national average: 4.7% compared to 4.4% (as at June 2020). However, this is likely to be a short-term drop due to a unique set of circumstances, and the unemployment rate is expected to rise as employment growth slows. The impact of job losses associated with COVID-19 has fallen disproportionately on youth in the workforce.
- One driver of unemployment is a difficulty in accessing jobs and educational opportunities, particularly in more remote areas. Far North Link and CityLink Whangārei play an important role in providing access to the employment centres in Kaitia and around Whangārei respectively.
- Attempts to link an available workforce in the west of the Far North to employment opportunities in the east have not been easy, due to the work's seasonal nature and varied hours. Phase 1 of the Mid North Link trial offered a daily service,

however, the long trip time and lack of frequency led to poor patronage. A much higher daily frequency would be needed; however, this does lead to affordability issues.

- Although Northland has a higher proportion of households with access to a motor vehicle than the national average, some parts of the region have areas with a lower rate of access. These areas also tend to suffer from higher unemployment and lower average incomes, implying there is a relationship between these different factors of deprivation.

Ageing population

Northland's population is ageing; this mirrors national and international trends for most developed economies. While the rate of this increase has slowed during the last seven years, the number of Northlanders aged between 65 and 85 has increased from 28,900 in 2013 to 39,300 in 2020, an average annual increase of 4.7% compared to the total Northland population increase of 2.4%. People aged over 65 years now account for 20% of the Northland population, compared to just 12% in 1996.

As the population ages, demand for public transport and Total Mobility services is likely to increase. This will create issues for the planning and prioritising of public transport investment in the region. Existing public transport services aim to better connect residents in more remote, rural communities to service centres. For example, Hokianga Link acts as a shopper service for those living in Opononi and Ōmāpere to access Kaikohe, and also travel on to Kerikeri by transferring to Mid North Link services at Kaikohe. Mid North Link and Far North Link services provide the same sort of connectivity. Again, there

is a need to retain services such as these to maintain the viability of living outside main centres, particularly for older members of the community who cannot, for various reasons, drive themselves.

Needs of people with disabilities

Although Whangārei district has a Total Mobility service, the Far North and Kaipara districts do not. At present, there are gaps in the understanding of the needs of those with a disability in these areas.

In 2020, Northland Regional Council commissioned a high-level investigation of the needs of Northland's transport-disadvantaged. It is anticipated the outcome of this investigation will highlight specific pockets of Northland where assistance is most needed, and Northland Regional Council will work with the relevant district council to try to address some of that need.

The full report can be found on the [Northland Regional Council website](#).

Affordability

As stated, Northland's average personal and household incomes are below the national average. As such, Northland will struggle to meet the local share typically required to receive funding from the National Land Transport Fund. Setting fares is a balancing act between affordability for council and affordability for the public, while recognising that a key goal for these services is to improve the economic and social outcomes for communities and attempt to reduce deprivation.

Services that link main centres in the north travel along routes through sparsely populated areas, often taking almost two hours in duration. However, it is critical to keep fares affordable.

Public expectations

The increasing use of technology is changing patterns of employment, commuting, recreation and education, as well as raising expectations about the convenience of public services. There is a need for public transport to 'raise its game' to meet these expectations. This means continued investment in both technology and infrastructure.

An on-demand passenger transport service is being trialled in Timaru and NRC is keeping a close eye on its progress (as are other regional councils). If successful after the 12-month trial, Environment

Canterbury plans to replace the existing fully scheduled service with this new model. Further details can be found at www.mywaybymetro.co.nz.

In Whangārei, there is a disconnect between the standard of vehicles used in the bus service and the associated infrastructure. This problem is particularly obvious with the Rose Street bus station, which does not meet the requirements of a modern public transport service in terms of safety, convenience or facilities offered. There is also a need for a full-time security presence at Rose Street, to deter the increasing levels of anti-social behaviour occurring there.

NRC and WDC have formed a working party (the WDC/NRC Whangārei Public Transport Working Party) to better address public transport issues for Whangārei. In the future, more flexible models of providing public transport are likely to be required rather than a 'one size fits all' model. To this end, more work is needed to find better and smarter solutions. Once-a-week schedules have proved popular in Bream Bay, and the same level of service has been recently been introduced on a trial basis for Hikurangi and Whangārei Heads.

WDC has also completed its Whangārei City Transportation Network Strategy, which contains a planned programme of works to enable trialling of T2 or T3 lanes, with some bus priority on three of the busier routes. This would give bus passengers a visible time advantage when travelling these routes either to or from the CBD.

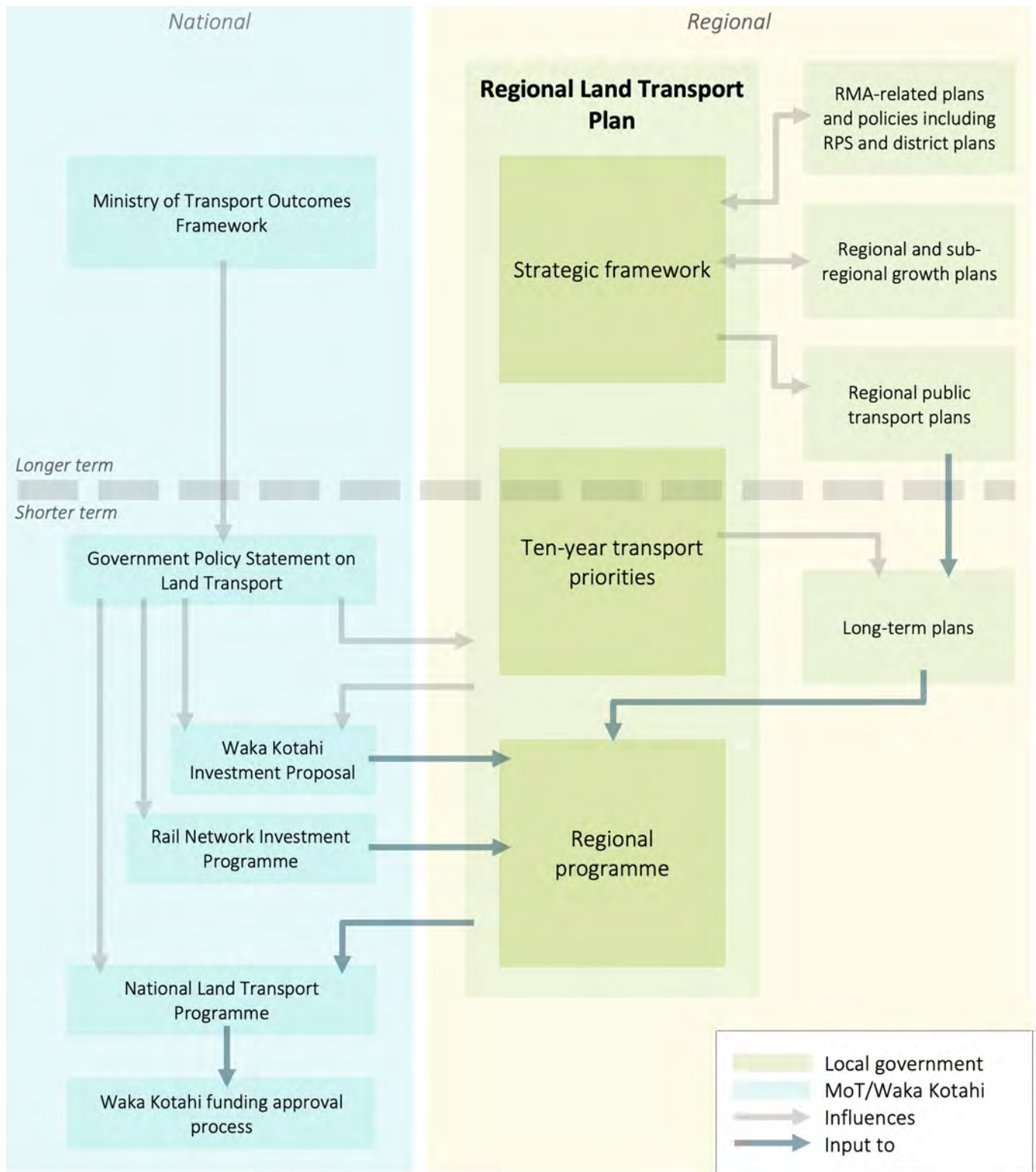
NRC recently secured a method of providing a simple 'real-time information' service for CityLink Whangārei passengers, which will include a simplified display showing expected bus arrival and departure times at Rose Street. This can be extended further once the proposed Rose Street bus terminus upgrade is completed by WDC. Further information will be released as the concept is developed.

Community vehicle trusts (see Policy 3) may be another alternative to fully fledged bus services, which are often unsustainable in the long term for rural areas.

Policy context

National legislation, strategies and plans

The Land Transport Management Act 2003 (the Act) was amended in 2013, repealing the Public Transport Management Act 2008 and bringing the relevant provisions into the Act.



The amendments also legislated for a Public Transport Operating Model – a new framework for the planning, procurement and delivery of public transport. Under this framework, there is a strong emphasis on early engagement and collaboration between regional councils, district councils and public transport operators and investors.

The government expects the sector to respond to the aim of growing patronage with less reliance on subsidies, and to achieve the following two objectives:

- grow the commerciality of public transport services and create incentives for services to become fully commercial; and
- grow confidence that services are priced efficiently and there is access to public transport markets for competitors.

The purpose of the Act is to “contribute to an effective, efficient and safe land transport system in the public interest”.

The Act requires a regional council to adopt a Regional Public Transport Plan (plan) if it intends to:

- a. enter into any contract for the supply of any public transport service
- b. provide any financial assistance to any operator or user of:
 - a taxi service, or
 - a shuttle service.

This means NRC must prepare a plan because it contracts, administers and rates for BusLink services, and administers the Total Mobility scheme in Whangārei. The role of a plan is three-fold:

- a means for encouraging regional councils and public transport operators to work together in developing public transport services and infrastructure; and
- an instrument for engaging with the public in the region on the design and operation of the public transport network; and
- a statement of:
 - the public transport services that are integral to the public transport network; and
 - the policies and procedures that apply to those services; and
 - the information and infrastructure that support those services.

Adoption of the plan will enable NRC to procure services required to deliver an integrated public transport network. Legally, the plan must:

- identify the public transport services that are integral to the public transport network that the regional council proposes to provide;
- provide an outline of the routes, frequency, and hours of operation of the services identified under subparagraph (i);
- arrange all of the public transport services identified in this way into units;
- indicate the date by which a unit is expected to start operating;
- indicate the date by which any exempt service that is to be replaced by a unit is to be deregistered;
- identify any units for which the regional council intends to provide financial assistance;
- identify any taxi services or shuttle services for which the regional council intends to provide financial assistance; and
- describe how the network of public transport services and the taxi/shuttles services will assist the transport-disadvantaged.

The plan must also specify any objectives and policies that are to apply to any units, and taxi/shuttle services. It may describe what are termed 'exempt services' but they cannot be subject to policies and objectives.

In relation to identified units, a regional council must include policies on:

- accessibility, quality, and performance;
- fares and the method or formula or other basis for setting and reviewing those fares;
- the process for establishing units;
- the approach that will be taken to procuring the delivery of the service or services in a unit;
- how the procurement of units will be phased in over time; and
- managing, monitoring, and evaluating the performance of units.

The plan must also contain a policy on significance. Other actions can also be included in the plan (for example, actions to be taken by the Regional Transport Committee or an agency).

The plan must be current for a minimum of three years and a maximum of ten. It must be reviewed and, if necessary, renewed or varied at the same time as (or as soon as possible after) the public transport components of the Regional Land Transport Plan are adopted or varied.

The council must also prepare a plans in accordance with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency guidelines for the preparation of these plans (under S124 of the Land Transport Management Act) and take into account any national and regional strategies, plans, legislation and guidelines and the need to obtain best value for money in fair and open competition for tender. NRC also must consider the views of public transport operators, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, the transport-disadvantaged and the general public.

Parts 2 and 3 of this document fulfil the statutory requirements listed above.

National direction

Ministry of Transport's Transport Outcomes Framework

The Transport Outcomes Framework, released in 2018, defines a set of outcomes for New Zealand's transport system and explains how government should work towards these outcomes through a guiding principle of mode neutrality. It establishes the groundwork for a strategic approach, by identifying what government is aiming to achieve through the transport system. It does not identify how government will deliver on those outcomes; it is up to government transport agencies to establish how they are affecting, and contributing to, the outcomes.

This framework defines mode neutrality as considering all transport modes when planning, regulating and funding transport, and basing decisions on delivering positive social, economic and environmental outcomes.

From a public transport perspective, the framework goes on to say that greater attention needs to be given to public transport and active travel modes in order to:

- improve inclusive access;
- support healthy and safe people;
- reduce carbon emissions; and
- make urban environments more liveable overall.

Ministry of Transport's Transport Outcomes Framework



In addition, both modes:

- support economic prosperity by helping to manage road congestion;
- increase foot traffic around local shops; and
- encourage development around transport hubs.

In Northland, public transport in rural areas provides important links to services not found in the smaller townships.

Government Policy Statement on Land Transport

The Government Policy Statement (GPS) on Land Transport is developed every three years by the government and helps to guide investment in land transport by providing a view of the government's land transport network priorities in addressing the outcomes in the Ministry of Transport's Transport Outcomes Framework (above).

It provides direction and guidance to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency on how to invest the National Land Transport Fund (the fund), and gives funding allocations for each activity class, with indicative ranges for a ten-year period. Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency must give effect to these strategic priorities when approving the subsidy requests contained in the Regional Land Transport Plan. More than \$4 billion a year from the fund is allocated to land transport activities that progress the government's objectives.

In the GPS on Land Transport 2021, there are 11 activity classes, including local road improvements, public transport infrastructure, Road to Zero, and walking and cycling improvements.

The statement has set the following strategic direction:

- **Safety** – developing a transport system where no-one is killed or seriously injured;
- **Better travel options** – providing people with better transport options to access social and economic opportunities;
- **Improving freight connections** – for economic development; and
- **Climate change** – developing a low-carbon transport system that supports emission reductions, while improving safety and inclusive access.

Northland's funding applications will be reviewed for consistency with this strategic direction.

Northland's Regional Land Transport Plan 2021–2027 takes into account the government's focus for the land transport system. This public transport plan details what is important to Northland in terms of passenger transport, and shows alignment where possible with government priorities in order to receive subsidies from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.

Further information on the statement can be found on the [Ministry of Transport website](#).

National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD 2020)

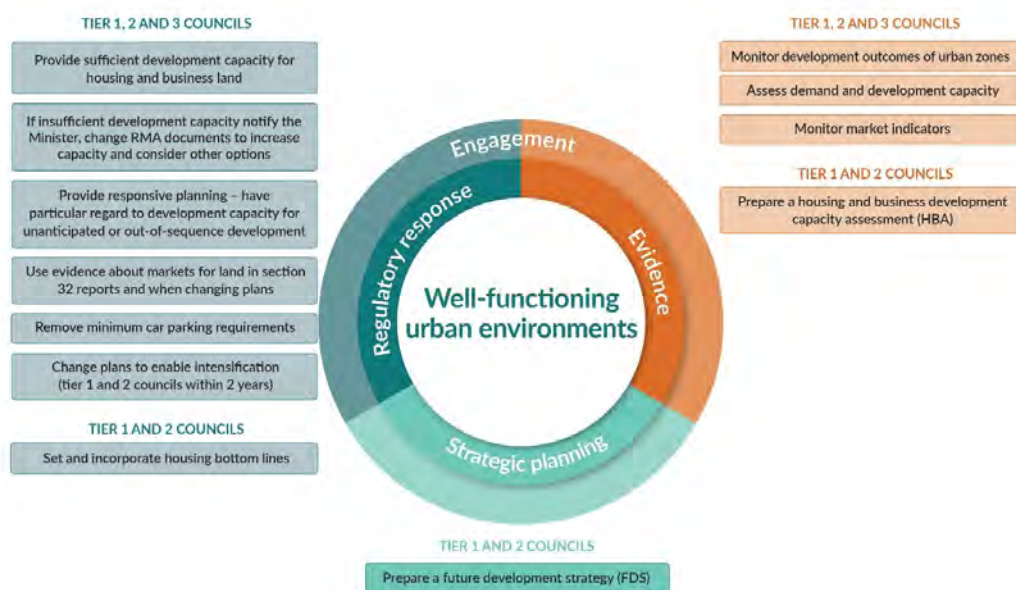
The NPS-UD 2020 came into effect on 20 August 2020, replacing the National Policy Statement on Urban Development Capacity 2016.

It requires councils to plan well for growth and ensure a well-functioning urban environment for all people, communities and future generations.

The objectives and high-level policies of the NPS-UD 2020 apply to all councils that have all or part of an urban environment within their district or region.

However, some policies only apply to Tier 1 or Tier 2 councils. WDC is a Tier 2 council, and has released a Draft District Growth Strategy outlining how they will meet the NPS-UD 2020 requirements.

The figure below shows the requirements on local authorities in terms of their regulatory response, evidence and strategic planning. Local authorities have differing timelines to implement policies; however, several actions must be undertaken in the next two years in order to inform their 2024 Long Term Plans.



Further information can be found on the [Ministry for the Environment website](#).

National Infrastructure Plan

The National Infrastructure Plan sets out the government's overall vision for infrastructure, which is:

- Our markets will function smoothly and efficiently, unconstrained by over-congestion, poor asset

quality, or other infrastructure deficiencies that inhibit economic activity.

- Our infrastructure will offer appropriate resilience to natural disaster and changing patterns of use caused by climate change, rising energy prices and social, technological and demographic trends.
- Our economic infrastructure will be sufficient to enable all who are willing to pay their fair share of the cost to use it for social and business activities without impediment, while our social infrastructure will be sufficient to deliver the

services demanded by the community wherever the social and economic benefits exceed the costs.

For transport, the government's vision is:

"A variety of transport options will make New Zealand an easy and safe country to move around in and visit. The full social cost of each transport mode will be transparent and priced accordingly, enabling people and firms to make the best choice about how they move themselves, their goods and their ideas."

The full document can be viewed on the [Treasury website](#).

New Zealand Rail Plan

The New Zealand Rail Plan is a product of the recommendations that came out of the Future of Rail Review. The review was a cross-agency project led by the Ministry of Transport, working alongside KiwiRail, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, the Treasury, Auckland Transport and Greater Wellington to define and develop the future of rail in New Zealand. At the same time, the Metropolitan Operating Model for Rail was reviewed with Greater Wellington Regional Council and Auckland Transport, and this work will be progressed alongside the Future of Rail work.

The review looked at what purpose rail serves, and what outcomes rail can deliver for New Zealand as part of the transport system. The project also addressed how rail planning and funding can be integrated into the transport system and be looked after in the same way as other modes, ie. receive funding from the National Land Transport Fund. It defined the purpose of rail in the transport system and provided certainty for the government on what investment is needed for it to play that role.

The New Zealand Rail Plan outlines the government's long-term vision and priorities for New Zealand's national rail network. The delivery schedule is detailed in the recently released Rail Network Investment Programme (RNIP). The RNIP is approved by the Minister of Transport, and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency will advise the Minister on how the proposed RNIP, and the activities under it, fit with the broader National Land Transport Fund investment programme (ie. alignment with the Land Transport Management Act's purpose, and the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport). Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency will also monitor the delivery of the RNIP.

From a Northland perspective, central government rail investment for the foreseeable future (a ten-year horizon) will focus on restoring and upgrading the freight network between Northland and Auckland, and the spur line between Whangārei and Northport as Marsden Point.

Based on the above, passenger rail transport has not been addressed in this plan.

The full New Zealand Rail Plan can be viewed at:

[The New Zealand Rail Plan](#)

Regional and district strategies and plans

The following plans and strategies have either already been considered in the development of this document or are in the process of being developed at the time of writing.

Regional Land Transport Plan 2021–2027

The Regional Land Transport Plan 2021–2027 (RLTP) is the Regional Transport Committee's document (prepared on behalf of Northland Regional Council) setting out how Northland will optimise its land transport programme with assistance from the National Land Transport Fund. The RLTP brings together the transportation programmes of:

- the three territorial authorities for roading and other transport-related works;
- Northland Regional Council's transport planning, road safety education and public transport activities; and
- Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's investment in Northland's state highway network.

The RLTP looks at the entire land transport network and the interactions between the different modes to achieve the outcomes desired by the community and the government.

The community has an opportunity to feed into the proposed programme during each respective organisation's Long Term Plan consultation process, and again during the consultation process for this plan.

The RLTP must be consistent with the current government's strategic priorities (which are outlined in the GPS on Land Transport) if councils wish to attract central government funding from the National Land Transport Fund.

The Regional Public Transport Plan is prepared within the scope of the RLTP and must be consistent with this higher-level document. In this sense, the strategic direction and priorities for public transport have already been broadly set by the RLTP.

To do this, the Regional Transport Committee held an investment logic mapping exercise to:

- define the transport problems as they see them in Northland;

- identify the benefits in addressing those problems;
- form their strategic objectives to deliver their vision.

The investment logic mapping process is outlined on page 54. This public transport plan and the services within help to achieve the outcomes sought by Objective 2: Choice – ensure that the people of Northland have transport choice to access jobs and amenities, and they are well informed of these choices.

Whangārei District Council

Whangārei Transportation Network Strategy Programme Business Case

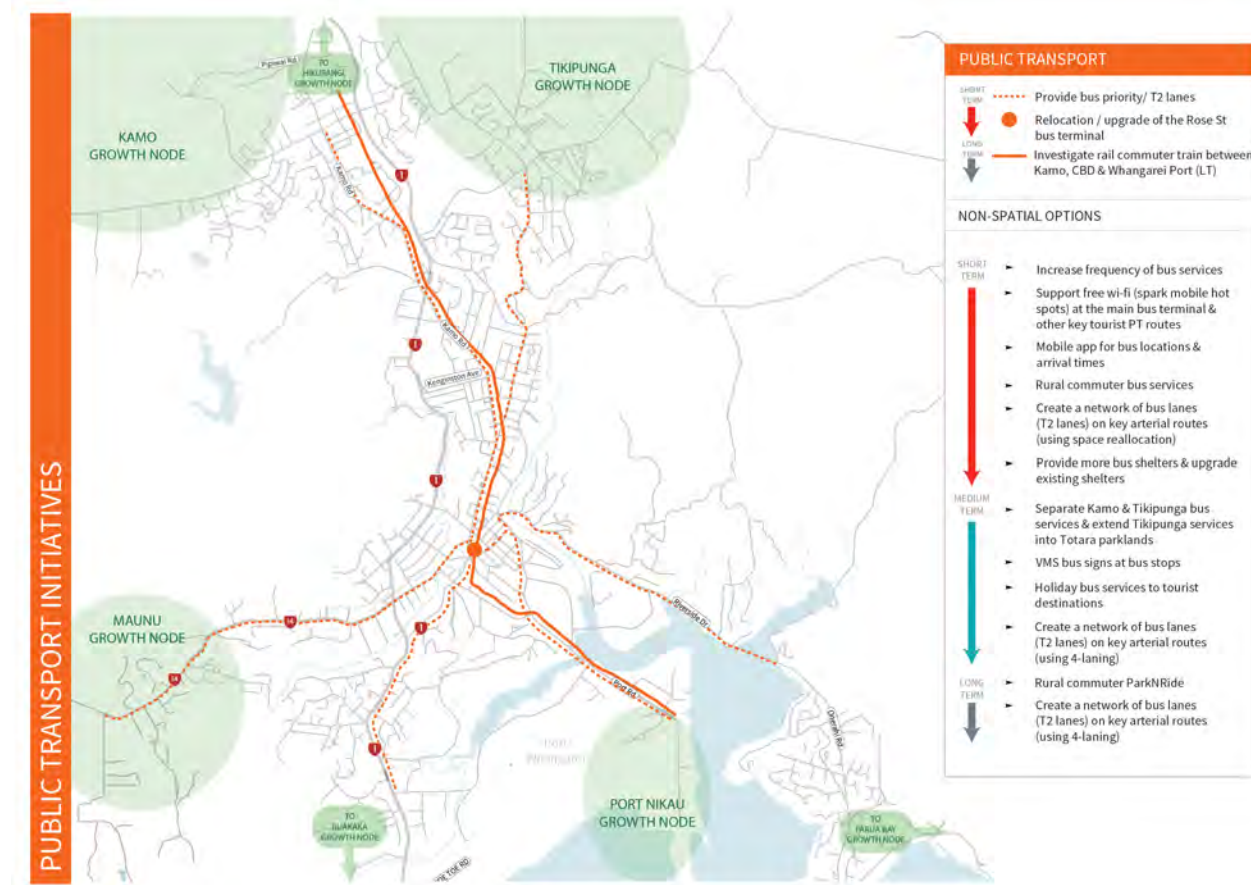
This Programme Business Case (the business case) considers the rationale for investment to address transportation problems in Whangārei city. While the business case is focused on Whangārei city, it also

considers the district-wide transport network and state highways, which have major influences on the city. This business case builds on the previous Whangārei Transportation Network Strategy that was developed in 2011 and endorsed by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency in October 2012.

The strategy sets out a business case for walking, cycling, public transport and roading in Whangārei city over a 30-year horizon. In respect to public transport, the strategy sets the target of achieving a 17-fold increase in commuter public transport patronage (to 10% mode share across the district). Further information on the strategy is available on request, as at the time of writing it was not yet available on the WDC website.

The step changes needed to implement the business case in relation to CityLink Whangārei are outlined in Appendix 5.

Public transport and walking and cycling initiatives



Kaipara District Council

A plan containing several trial initiatives to help alleviate congestion in Mangawhai township over the peak summer holiday period was developed by Kaipara District Council in 2018. One initiative was the trial of a summer bus service linking the main centre with

the surf beach at Mangawhai Heads for the peak three-week holiday period, and other weekends as required.

Focus in recent months has shifted to include providing a safe active-transport (walking and cycling) alternative in the long term, and it is planned for the summer bus service to continue.

Spatial planning has recently been undertaken in the Kaipara district, along with community plans for Dargaville, Ruawai, Kaiwaka and Mangawhai.

These community plans can be viewed on the [Kaipara District Council website](#)

Far North District Integrated Transport Strategy

The Far North District Council continues to develop its Integrated Transport Strategy, which contains an extensive action plan. Of the five strategic responses, one relates directly to public transport by “improving our transport choices” – which proposes to introduce a bus stop and shelter policy, to support the three contracted bus services operating in the district.

Far North District Council is also investigating options for travel demand management initiatives, and it is proposed to undertake some longer-term harbour ferry planning.

Growth, land use and spatial planning

At the time of writing, work is either underway or completed on the three district councils’ draft growth and spatial plans. More work needs to be undertaken to fully incorporate public transport into these plans, and in turn to consider the outcomes of those plans in the review of this document.

Part 2: Strategic framework

This section contains the objectives, policies and methods for public transport in the region.

Northland Regional Council’s public transport vision

Long-term vision: The public transport network in Northland is safe, accessible and convenient, with high-quality, low-emission vehicles and modern, fit-for-purpose facilities. The network gets people where they want to go, and when they want to go – as a result, it is well used and valued by the people of Northland.

Objectives, policies and actions for public transport

Objectives to support public transport in the region are designed to support relevant outcomes from the Regional Land Transport Plan 2021–2027 and which are outlined in the GPS on Land Transport. These are as follows:

1. Northland has an effective, affordable and sustainable bus network in, and linking, main centres with easily sourced timetable and travel information.

2. Public transport offers reliable travel times and safe transport choices for communities servicing employment areas, retail and public services.
3. People have access to shared transport options.
4. Transport management, including public transport, is effectively incorporated into land-use planning.
5. Our procurement system supports the delivery of practical public transport services and values the retention of local operators.
6. The needs of the transport-disadvantaged are considered.
7. Public transport in Northland contributes towards a reduction in carbon emission intensity of transport to assist in meeting the government’s greenhouse gas targets.

The following tables contain the key policies and methods proposed for public transport in the region, while giving effect to the objectives above. Collectively, these also put into practice the broader transport direction expressed in the Regional Land Transport Plan.

Objective 1: Northland has an effective, affordable and sustainable bus network in, and linking, main centres with easily sourced timetable and travel information

This objective seeks to maintain and enhance the quality of Northland's public transport system.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 1.1 – Maintain (and enhance where practicable) existing service levels</i>			
Method i	Continue to provide an accessible bus network in Whangārei through a competitive tender process. The buses used must meet Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's relevant requirements for urban buses in New Zealand.	Ongoing	Providing a robust contracting process will support value-for-money delivery of effective and efficient public transport services in Whangārei.
Method ii	Where feasible and viable, continue to maintain current patterns of services and frequencies in Northland, and optimise these services through regular network reviews.	Ongoing	Services will be responsive to passenger demand where possible.
Method iii	Investigate and further develop CityLink Whangārei in line with initiatives outlined in WDC's Whangārei Transportation Network Strategy.	Undertaken in line with the Whangārei Transportation Network Strategy Short term: 1 – 3 years Medium term: 4 – 6 years Long term: ongoing	If approved, and the necessary funding secured, a CityLink Network Plan will be developed, aimed at providing a demand-driven frequency to meet expectations outlined in WDC's Whangārei Transportation Network Strategy.
Method iv	Where feasible and viable, expand coverage of public passenger transport over the longer term to include areas of new growth and development.	3 – 6 years	Expanding coverage to new areas of growth around the region will maintain effective and efficient public transport services where the level of demand is evidenced.
<i>Policy 1.2 – Maintain a fair and equitable funding approach</i>			
Method i	Maintain a fair and equitable farebox recovery policy for services in the region (refer to Part 3 for the detail of the ratio that is to be applied).	Ongoing	This is essential to ensure as many people as possible can access employment, health, social and other services.
Method ii	Review fares on an annual basis (refer to Appendix 3).	Ongoing	As above

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
Method iii	Maintain concessionary fares for children on CityLink Whangārei (aged 5-15 or those still attending a secondary school).	Ongoing	As above
Method iv	Investigate new ways of funding CityLink, for example funding partnerships with tertiary education providers, and commercial sponsorship.	At least every 6 years	As above
<i>Policy 1.3 - Improve public transport information</i>			
Method i	<p>Continue to investigate the feasibility and viability of introducing real-time passenger information (RTPI) for key bus routes in Whangārei. The order of priority should be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rose Street bus station (or a successor hub). 2. High-patronage and high-frequency bus routes. 3. Other routes. 	1 – 3 years	<p>RTPI could be accommodated in a future public transport hub. Rose Street terminus office now has a 60-inch RTPI screen displaying the next bus departing for all routes, updated timetable information and any service disruptions that are occurring.</p> <p>At present, other locations do not have the frequency of services to warrant RTPI, but this may change over the longer term.</p>
Method ii	Encourage district councils to provide fit-for-purpose bus stop facilities: at a minimum, bus stop poles with timetable information, and where possible also seating and shelter.	1 – 3 years	Will clearly show intending passengers where to wait for the bus safely, protected from rain or sun if possible, and to view timetable information.
Method iii	Improve face-to-face customer service at Rose Street bus station.	1 – 3 years	This is currently provided by contracting personnel who provide not only a security presence, but also help with timetable information and Bee Card top-ups.
Method iv	Keep www.buslink.co.nz and www.citylinkWhangarei.co.nz websites up to date.	Ongoing	Ensure up-to-date timetable and service change information is available online, to make using public transport simple.
<i>Policy 1.4 - Improve payment options for CityLink</i>			

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
Method i	Maintain a smart card system and investigate the feasibility of incentivised pricing to further encourage the use of smart card technology.	Ongoing	The new smart card system (Bee Card) is in place on CityLink Whangārei vehicles, however, council will consider viability of moving to national integrated system (NEXT). Council to consider raising cash fares but leaving smart card fares at current levels to encourage uptake of smart card usage.
Method ii	Encourage registration of Bee Cards in use in Whangārei.	Ongoing	Registered cards can be cancelled by the registered cardholder if lost, and the remaining credit balance can be transferred to new cards. Unregistered cards cannot, and if lost, the remaining credit can be used by anyone who finds the card.
Method iii	Make it easier for passengers to top up their Bee Card.	Ongoing	Bee Card top-ups can be done online (www.beecard.co.nz) or in person at the Rose Street bus terminus. Regular reminders and other promotional activity will reinforce messaging on this.
Method iv	Remain involved with the national integrated ticketing system (NEXT) currently being developed.	Ongoing	Consider moving to the national system if viable, and investigate whether the new system can be used by Whangārei card holders when travelling in Auckland (our nearest neighbour).
<i>Policy 1.5 - Regularly collate and monitor customer feedback on BusLink services</i>			
Method i	<p>Regularly collect information (as it relates to customer experience) on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timeliness of services • customer satisfaction • passenger facilities • complaints, resolved and unresolved. 	<p>Every two years and during promotional events.</p> <p>Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency requires regional councils to conduct a passenger satisfaction survey every two years. They supply the questions that must be asked, and the responses must be collated and submitted</p>	<p>Collecting customer feedback can help optimise service patterns, and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the service.</p> <p>All BusLink services will be surveyed.</p>

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
		to them via the Transport Investment Online (TIO) portal	
Policy 1.6 – Improve bus infrastructure			
Method i	<p>Whangārei</p> <p>Coordinate with WDC on providing new infrastructure required to support public transport services. As a priority, seek to fund improvement for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessibility, weather cover, lighting and safety improvements at Rose Street bus station as planned • accessibility improvements at bus stops, especially for stops that serve those with restricted mobility • bus priority measures. <p>Kaipara and Far North</p> <p>Advocate for bus-stop facilities where practicable to support services in operation.</p>	Ongoing	<p>Rose Street bus terminus is programmed for an upgrade commencing in the 2021/22 financial year.</p> <p>Making this facility more attractive, well lit, accessible and safer to use will contribute to increasing patronage.</p> <p>A process for allocating new bus shelters will be developed in late 2021.</p>
Method ii	Investigate the potential for lockable bicycle racks and lockers at Rose Street bus terminus.	1 – 3 years	All CityLink Whangārei buses have been fitted with bicycle racks capable of carrying two bicycles at a time. To support this investment, NRC will encourage WDC to provide secure bicycle infrastructure provision at Rose Street bus terminus.
Method iii	Liaise with all three district councils to develop general opportunities to enhance infrastructure that improves security as appropriate.	Ongoing	As physical infrastructure works fall under the district council's remit, NRC will advocate strongly for the necessary improvements through the relevant Long Term Plan / Annual Plan processes.

Objective 2: Public transport offers reliable travel times and safe transport choices for communities, servicing employment areas, retail and public services

AND

Objective 3: People have access to shared transport options

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 2.1 - Improve modal choice in the region</i>			
Method i	<p>Work with providers of rural public transport services where possible to promote and develop non-contracted services.</p> <p>Contracted services will be considered for expansion (either as the existing unit or as an additional separate operating unit) into rural areas where there is enough proven demand.</p>	Ongoing	Northland Regional Council will work with providers to supply advice and support, including funding where appropriate, to increase transport choice and access.
Method ii	Submit on resource consents/plan changes for new hospitals, schools, retail and large businesses, and large-scale subdivisions, promoting travel plans and encouraging integration with public transport options.	Ongoing	Integrating public transport options at an early stage of development will provide future-proofing.
Method iii	Support transport connections between significant population centres and centres of employment, and review bus services to ensure employment areas are effectively serviced. Ensure links to main health facilities (ie. hospitals) are prioritised, but not at the expense of health providers door-to-door services.	Ongoing	<p>Continued support for contracted bus services in the region will provide alternatives to the car, especially for those in the aged community and those accessing employment and educational opportunities. The Far North Link services Kaitiaki Hospital and CityLink services Whangārei Hospital.</p> <p>Reliable services should encourage a shift from driving unsafe older vehicles to taking public transport where possible.</p>
Method iv	Develop and enhance appropriate multi-modal connections (eg. an airport bus link), and alternative transport solutions such as community vehicle trusts.	Ongoing	There is presently a contracted bus service to Whangārei Airport. This relatively frequent service provides an alternative method of travel to the airport.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
			<p>Kerikeri and Kaitaia airports are serviced by local shuttle and/or private hire operators.</p> <p>Community vehicle trusts will allow for services in communities with strong volunteer groups.</p>
Method v	Encourage WDC to develop a parking management strategy for Whangārei that helps to grow CityLink Whangārei patronage.	Ongoing	Good parking management strategies should account for opportunities to prioritise public transport over private car use. NRC strongly advocates that until a clear benefit is obvious, it will be difficult to attract additional passengers. Opportunities are bus priority lanes to provide quicker travel and/or increasing all-day parking charges to the point where it becomes cheaper to catch the bus to and from town as opposed to paying for parking.
Method vi	Develop rideshare opportunities. This can include highlighting opportunities for carpooling or vanpooling.	Ongoing	Rideshare opportunities can promote transport choices in rural areas. This ties in with the need for more tailored choices for certain communities.
Policy 2.2 - Reduce the affordability gap			
Method i	Investigate potential to access funding from alternative funding sources to support services in low-decile and isolated areas.	Ongoing	NRC will work with government agencies and other service providers to source funding to support rural services.
Method ii	Maintain support for the SuperGold Card scheme.	Ongoing	The SuperGold Card provides a discounted service for those over 65. It is important to support accessibility to services for the older population.
Method iii	Advocate for rural services contracted to NRC to be included in the SuperGold Card scheme.	Ongoing	National funding constraints have meant restricted eligibility criteria to join the scheme. NRC will continue to advocate for its rural services to be included.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
Method iv	Maintain a fair and affordable fare structure for all passenger transport services(refer to Part 4 for details on the rationale to be applied).	Ongoing	As stated, the ability to pay the local share in rural areas is more difficult than in urban areas. To provide transport choice, however, a higher subsidy level for rural services will be necessary if the public transport services are to succeed.
<i>Policy 2.3 - Improve accessibility for those without access to a car</i>			
Method i	Promote individual travel plans for town centres that lead to creating walkable, pleasant environments for communities and visitors.	Ongoing	This action is led by district councils, however, NRC will provide appropriate support for any public transport component.
Method ii	Investigate the potential for accessibility to be mapped in urban and rural towns/areas.	1 – 3 years	This action is led by district councils, however, NRC will provide appropriate support for any public transport component.
Method iii	Investigate the potential for transport services(contracting or otherwise) to be introduced where requested.	Ongoing	Given the rural nature of Northland's communities, this can be difficult – however, transport is often raised as a barrier to community participation by those without a car.
<i>Policy 2.4 - Maintain and expand, where practicable, support for those with a transport disadvantage</i>			
Method i	Provide ongoing administrative support for the Total Mobility scheme.	Ongoing	This is critical to providing transport choice and access to services for those with an impairment.
Method ii	Evaluate the findings of the Northland Transport Needs Investigation, the recently completed report into the need for and availability of the Total Mobility scheme, and other disability transport and services, in Northland, with a view to implementing its recommendations.	1 – 3 years	The recently completed regional investigation supports the need for increased Total Mobility and disability-related services. However, the required actions have not yet been workshopped with the appropriate partners and stakeholders to ensure the correct action is being taken.
Method iii	Support and liaise with district councils to improve infrastructure for greater accessibility.	Ongoing	As above.

Objective 4: Transport management, including public transport, is effectively incorporated into land use planning

This objective is focused on ensuring joined-up decision making for land use and transport planning.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 4.1 – Integrated land-use and transport decisions</i>			
Method i	Work with district councils to ensure public transport considerations are effectively integrated into development proposals where appropriate. This will be in the form of submission to district plans, spatial and growth strategies (including placemaking projects) and via resource consents for large developments.	Ongoing	Work with district councils to ensure public transport considerations are effectively integrated into development proposals where appropriate. This will be in the form of submission to district plans, spatial and growth strategies (including placemaking projects) and via resource consents for large developments.
Method ii	Work with district councils to ensure mode-neutral (multi-modal) demand management measures are effectively integrated into development proposals.	Ongoing	As above.
Method iii	During the life of this plan, review district spatial and growth strategies in order to more fully inform future public transport requirements.	Ongoing	Will ensure consistency and that Whangārei meets the requirements of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and the GPS on Land Transport.

Objective 5: Our procurement system supports the delivery of practical public transport services and values the retention of local operators

This objective is focused on implementing the Public Transport Operating Model (PTOM) approach to contracting and operating public transport services as required. However, in Northland it is acknowledged that there is at times considerable benefit to directly appointing small-scale local contracts, particularly where the benefits are non-monetised.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 5.1 – Establishing and operating contracted public transport units under PTOM</i>			
Method i	<p>Procurement arrangements for public transport services in Northland will continue in line with PTOM principles. The procurement of public transport services will be undertaken in accordance with all the requirements of the Land Transport Management Act 2003 and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's procurement requirements. Services integral to the network identified in Part 4 of this plan will form the basis for PTOM units.</p> <p>A contract can only be operated for the entire unit and must meet the specifications and contracting requirements in Part 4 of this document.</p>	Ongoing	An effective procurement system will need to be compliant with PTOM requirements.
Method ii	<p>New PTOM units may be established during the life of the RPTP. These new units will be established using the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unit will be a marketable whole that services key destinations, targeting certain demographics including the transport-disadvantaged. • Establishing units in a manner that maintains a competitive and attractive market with a range of unit sizes across the region. • Emphasis on financial returns generated by services and innovation. • Exclusivity of operation. <p>Economic efficiency and operational efficiency.</p>	Ongoing	This will ensure NRC is contracting its public passenger transport services in accordance with both the PTOM and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency tendering and contract requirements.

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits(how the action will meet the objective)
Method iii	Encourage the receipt of local operator tenders and work with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency to fully develop the benefits framework to include non-monetised benefits.	Ongoing	While maintaining PTOM compliance, the non-monetised benefits of a local operator tender may equal the monetised benefits expected by receiving a tender from a large nationwide company.
<i>Policy 5.2 - Identify specific services that are not subject to PTOM contracting</i>			
Method i	Provide for exempt services to operate in the region outside of PTOM.	Ongoing	This will provide flexibility for services to operate when not subject to PTOM.
Method ii	Maintain a schedule of exempt services for the avoidance of doubt.	Ongoing	This will ensure NRC meets its obligations under the Public Transport Management Act 2008.
<i>Policy 5.3 - Require robust information from public transport operators under PTOM contracts</i>			
Method i	<p>The following information shall be required of public transport operators under contract to NRC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● reliability (early running) ● reliability (cancellation) ● punctuality (late running) ● patronage and passenger kilometres ● service inputs (in service kilometres and hours delivered) ● farebox revenue ● safety and security ● driver training. <p>Much of this operational data can be obtained directly by NRC via the Bee Card ticketing system for CityLink Whangārei. A revised model will be implemented for the smaller rural services.</p> <p>These will be regularly monitored and reported on by NRC where appropriate (refer to Monitoring and review, Part 4)</p>	Ongoing	This will help ensure that PTOM contracts are operating effectively, efficiently and in accordance with the operator's contractual obligations.

Objective 6: The needs of the transport disadvantaged are considered

Policy	Actions	Timeframe	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 6.1 – Pursue improved accessibility for isolated communities and mobility-impaired persons</i>			
Method i	Advocate for 2018–2021 trial services to be moved into the continuous programme of passenger transport services for 2021–24 onwards.	Ongoing	This will give certainty to residents that services will remain in operation, to provide regular access to services.
Method ii	Continue to trial services in areas where the community has shown the willingness to pay.	Ongoing	Trial services are fluid and flexible and can be adapted to find the right long-term solution for the targeted community.
Method iii	Evaluate the findings of the recently completed investigation into the need for and availability of the Total Mobility scheme, and other disability transport and services, in Northland, with a view to implementing its recommendations (such as support for volunteer-based community transport services).	Ongoing	Community vehicle trusts are a proven model operating in Canterbury, and improve access for rural communities.

Objective 7: Public transport in Northland contributes towards a reduction in carbon emission intensity of transport to assist in meeting the government's greenhouse gas targets

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
<i>Policy 7.1 – Encourage mode shift from private vehicles to public transport where available</i>			
Method i	CityLink Whangārei will continue to be promoted to increase patronage, with the aim of reducing the number of private vehicles (particularly single occupancy) using the network.	Ongoing	Fewer cars on the road
Method ii	More specifically, when bus priority lane trials and eventually T2/T3 lanes are provided in Whangārei, CityLink will increase frequency of trips, particularly in peak times.	Ongoing	Showing a time advantage for CityLink passengers over private vehicle use will encourage mode shift and lead to fewer cars on the road.
Method iii	Encourage Whangārei District Council to review their parking management strategy.	Ongoing	Key to the CityLink improvement programme is showing a price advantage for bus passengers when compared to the cost of all-day parking.
<i>Policy 7.2 – CityLink Whangārei will comply with national requirements for urban buses</i>			
Method i	As the only urban bus service in Northland, the operator of CityLink Whangārei will be required to comply with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's requirements for urban buses.	Ongoing	Ensuring compliance will lead to a consistent standard of vehicles in use across the whole fleet, and ensure accessibility.
<i>Policy 7.3 – NRC will contribute to the decarbonisation of the passenger transport fleet</i>			
Method i	NRC staff will actively participate in the Local Government NZ Transport Special Interest Group workstream "Decarbonisation of the Passenger Transport Fleet".	Ongoing	Participation should lead to a more cost-effective introduction of electric vehicles in Whangārei, otherwise not possible for a small region such as Northland.
Method ii	NRC has signalled potential investment in a full electric fleet for CityLink Whangārei from 2027.	Ongoing	Procurement and ownership models will be investigated on a national basis.
<i>Policy 7.4 – Diesel emissions from the CityLink fleet will not exceed the standards outlined in the requirements for urban buses for more than one half day of service before being addressed</i>			

Policy	Actions	Timeframes	Benefits (how the action will meet the objective)
Method i	CityLink Whangārei operator will be required to develop, implement and report on the fleet servicing and maintenance programmes.	Ongoing	Regular maintenance and servicing of the fleet will ensure optimum operational efficiency and reduce emissions from the fleet.
Method ii	Any public complaints regarding emissions will be investigated and responded to as per the complaints procedure detailed in the contract manual.	Ongoing	The recording of emission complaints will help to identify, and in turn address, any excessive emissions.
Method iii	Monitor the contractually required fleet upgrade for CityLink Whangārei.	Late 2020	Buses with Euro 3 engines have been removed from service and are being replaced with vehicles with Euro 5 motors.

Part 3: Investment priorities

Whangārei District Council has recently completed a review of its Whangārei City Transportation Network Strategy, and this provides the business case for several improvements required to be made in Whangārei to address congestion and encourage a shift from private vehicles to more active alternatives such as public transport.

Key projects

There are four key projects requiring significant investment in order to grow the service to meet the demands and expectations of the community. These are briefly outlined below.

Rose Street terminus

As previously mentioned, the condition of the Rose Street bus terminus has been deteriorating for some years. WDC has recently reviewed several design solutions to upgrade the terminus and surrounds, and it is understood that work will be completed in 2021/22.

Operationally, more room is required for any future increase in the number of peak-time vehicles having to be accommodated, as well as more modern seating, weather protection and pedestrian access for passengers from other parts of the CBD.

CityLink Whangārei increased frequency

CityLink Whangārei has been operating the same timetable for some years now, with only minor additions to operating hours and routes. The service now requires additional investment to make improvements to meet public expectation, and to encourage a mode shift from private car to public transport. In particular, capacity in the afternoon peak hours is nearing saturation.

NRC has recently secured a web-based scheduling programme that will enable staff to model various scenarios to help with decision making. NRC also consulted with the public during the 2021-2031 Long Term Plan about their willingness to pay for increased investment in the service, and has applied to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for funding assistance.

Whangārei bus lane trial

As has been stated earlier in this plan, a clear and visible benefit is needed to entice a mode shift from private vehicles to public transport. As part of WDC's Whangārei City Transportation Network Strategy, a

commitment has been made to trial bus lanes where possible within the current footprint of the roading network. The intent is that buses that visibly have an advantage in time over other vehicles will become more attractive to use.

Regional rural services

NRC is committed to retaining the current network of contracted passenger services, but given the distance between settlements, it can be difficult to initiate and retain services. Challenges to be overcome include high operating kilometres, low passenger numbers, retaining an affordable fare level, and securing local and national funding assistance. NRC will continue to make every effort to improve existing rural services, as demand dictates and with the continued funding assistance from local and central government.

Provincial Growth Funding

The Twin Coast Discovery Highway is an 800km circular touring route that includes the east and west coasts of Northland, connecting key tourist attractions and communities.

Work in 2016 and 2017 identified improvements to the route to help grow Northland's economy, through safer, reliable and accessible journeys and an enhanced visitor experience.

This group of business cases identifies the potential for increased frequency on the Mid North Link bus service in order to:

- improve access to employment and tourism opportunities
- increase connectivity
- provide new connections to significant historical and cultural points of interest.

Funding for implementing these services has not yet been confirmed.

The business case for increased public transport on the Mid North Link can be viewed in the SH11 business case at www.nzta.govt.nz/twin-coast-discovery-route

Further information on the full group of business cases for the Twin Coast Discovery Route can be viewed at www.nzta.govt.nz/twin-coast-discovery-business-cases

Part 4: Operating and funding public transport

The Public Transport Operating Model requires all services in a region to be segmented into units and provided for under exclusive contracts to the regional council. Services that do not form part of a region's core urban public transport network will be exempt from operating under contracts and will be identified as exempt services.

Allocation of services to units

One of the major components of the proposed operational framework is the allocation of services to operational units. Each unit is made up of a service route or group of service routes operating to a timetable that applies to the entire route or group of routes specified for that unit.

Whangārei CityLink service level and description

Unit	Service Level	Description	Commencement
Whangārei CityLink	Urban	Operates Monday to Saturday, not Sundays and public holidays. Existing holidays and frequencies are outlined in Appendix 4.	New contract commenced in 2017/18

CityLink is classed as 'urban' under the terms of Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's requirements for urban buses in New Zealand.

Objectives, policies and methods on performance, quality and monitoring requirements for this unit are outlined in Part 2 of this document.

Rural services

There are several rural services contracted to council that are considered to provide important connections across the region. These contracts provide connectivity to each other as well as to regional commercial services where possible.

Whangārei CityLink

Due to its operational nature and the ability to efficiently cross-subsidise the routes, it is not proposed to split CityLink into individual units for the following reasons:

- A split would be unlikely to deliver two or more 'marketable wholes', as there is in fact considerable overlap of vehicles and drivers on the services. Operating two units may result in increased costs rather than efficiencies and NRC could struggle to find operators prepared to add them to an existing business.
- Tenderers would be likely to want to group the units anyway, subject to the regional council procurement policy.

Trip lengths (depending on where passengers board) can be up to 70 kilometres one way and take up to 1.5 hours to complete. As they operate over sparsely populated routes, farebox revenue can be low, however, the importance of these services and the contribution they make to accessibility cannot be overlooked.

Rural services service level and description

Unit	Service Level	Description	Commencement
Far North Link	Rural	Operates mainly between Monday and Friday, excluding public holidays (some routes are less frequent)	Annually renewed contract. At the time of completing the 2021-2031 Regional Public Transport Plan, the Far North Link service is being tendered in accordance with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's procurement requirements.
Hokianga Link (Opononi / Ōmāpere – Kaikohe)	Rural	Three days per week	Annually renewed contract. At the time of completing the 2021-2031 Regional Public Transport Plan, the Hokianga Link service is being tendered in accordance with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's procurement requirements.
Mid North Link (Kaikohe to Bay of Islands via Kawakawa and Kerikeri)	Rural	Three days per week	Annually renewed contract. At the time of completing the 2021-2031 Regional Public Transport Plan, the Mid North Link service is being tendered in accordance with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's procurement requirements.
Bream Bay Link	Rural to Whangārei	Once per week	Annually renewed contract. At the time of completing the 2021-2031 Regional Public Transport Plan, the Bream Bay Link service is being tendered in accordance with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's procurement requirements.

Future contracted services

The following services currently under trial are identified as future potential contracted services:

Unit	Service Level	Description	Commenced
Whangārei Heads Link	Rural to Whangārei	Once per week	Commenced Nov 2020

Unit	Service Level	Description	Commenced
Hikurangi Link	Rural to Whangārei	Once per week	Commenced Nov 2020

Should these services prove successful and future funding assistance be secured, it is proposed to move these trials into council's continuous programme of works from November 2021. Minor operational changes may be made through the life of the programme.

Small value targeted trials

Unit	Service Level	Description	Commenced
Mangawhai Summer Beach Bus Service	Rural	Targeted to reduce peak holiday congestion between Wood Street and Mangawhai Heads	First trial was summer of 2019/20. Will be re-trialled in 2020/21.

Total Mobility

Council will also continue to administer the Total Mobility scheme (policies and methods for Total Mobility are included in Part 2).

Exempt services

The Land Transport Management Act 2003 requires all exempt services in a region to be registered before operation. The following criteria are to be used to determine whether a service is to be exempt:

- Inter-regional public transport services.
- A public transport service that:
 - begins, or is to begin, operating after the plan is adopted;
 - is not identified in the plan as integral to the public transport network; and
 - operates without a subsidy for the provision of the service.
- Bus services registered with council as a commercial public transport service before 30 June 2011 that did not offer fares in accordance with the fare schedule published by the council.

- A public transport service that began operating after 30 June 2011 that is not identified in this plan and operates without a subsidy.
- A public transport service that is specified as exempt by an order in council.

There are registered commercial services that operate without any financial support from the council. These are discussed in Part 1 of this plan and include inter-regional bus services and school services. As these services operate independently, operators can set fares, timetables and routes as they see appropriate. Section 153 of the Land Transport Management Act 2003 states these services will be treated as registered exempt services.

In addition, several ferry services operate in Northland:

- The Rāwene-Kohukohu (Hokianga) vehicle ferry is classed as an 'exempt service' as it receives subsidy from the road funding budget as an alternative to a bridge.
- The Ōpua-Ōkiato vehicle ferry service and Paihia-Russell pedestrian ferry service are classed as exempt services because they pre-date the Land Transport Management Act 2003 and operate without subsidy on a commercial basis. The operators of these services are not contracted to council.

Other than CityLink Whangārei and the BusLink group of services, all other public transport services in the region are currently considered exempt. To avoid doubt, a register of exempt services will be maintained by the council. There are no exempt services that council intends to de-register and replace with a unit.

Sources of funding for contracted bus units

Funding for contracted public transport units comes from three main sources:

- fare revenue from passengers;
- council, which raises most of its funds from local ratepayers via a targeted transport rate; and
- Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, which (if approved) provides 54% of the net cost of the service.

Other external funding sources could include, but are not limited to:

- paid partnerships with the likes of tertiary institutes;
- partnerships with other government agencies (eg. Northland District Health Board);
- commercial advertising in and on vehicles;

- sponsorship; and
- a territorial authority that council contracts an operator on behalf of, ie. Mangawhai summer beach bus service.

These, and any other possible external funding opportunities, will be investigated further during the ten-year period of the plan. There are no such partnerships at the time of writing.

Affordability, best value and NRC's approach to contracting public transport units

When considering contracted public transport units, the Regional Public Transport Plan must consider affordability and value for money.

Affordability can relate to Northland's ability to source the required funding to operate contracted public transport units through:

- national subsidies;
- local share funding; and
- farebox revenue.

This type of affordability is addressed in the farebox recovery policy (Policy 1).

Affordability can also relate to users' ability to pay. NRC's fare review policy (Policy 5) provides a framework for monitoring fare suitability against various criteria, including affordability.

Value for money looks at how various policies in this plan might affect how public transport operators perceive the desirability of competing in an efficient market.

A network review of CityLink was undertaken in 2014. Patrons of the bus services were asked whether they would support new routes, changes to timetabling and an increase in a single ticket price. The network review findings included:

- Support for new services, including an Okara Park service and suggestions on route and timetabling changes.
- Support for a more sophisticated fare system and broader use of concessionary fares, plus suggestions of a fare structure review. Some feedback suggested the council should explore a zoned fare system.
- Mixed views on a proposed fare increase greater than \$3 for a single trip, but support for lowering both the transfer fare and single-trip fare.
- Support for later buses on Saturday and a service on Sunday.

Council introduced a number of these changes when it awarded the current contract in 2018.

Regarding concessions, council offers a reduced flat fare across the CityLink service rather than introducing multiple concessions. This reduced fare was offered initially to help with the testing and nationwide introduction of the Bee Card system.

However, several events (including COVID-19) have occurred that create a need to retain the current flat fare, to ensure access to wider Whangārei remains affordable.

Core programme for future public transport

The core programme has largely a 'business as usual' approach. The main components are below.

- Public transport services:
 - CityLink Whangārei - the CityLink improvement programme in Appendix 5 is subject to NRC and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency agreement to continue required funding.
 - Far North Link
 - Hokianga Link
 - Mid North Link
 - Bream Bay Link.
- Moving the Hikurangi Link and Whangārei Heads Link to the core programme if the 2020/21 12-month trials are successful.
- Total mobility services:
 - Continued support for the Total Mobility scheme in Whangārei district;
 - Improvements such as community vehicles trusts or other on-demand services that might prove viable; and
 - Investigations into the feasibility and viability of introducing Total Mobility-type services in other areas of Northland.

Approach to contracting

Where an existing or proposed council-contracted bus service and Total Mobility scheme service are eligible for national funding through the National Land Transport Programme, these services will be tendered and contracted in accordance with the requirements of the Northland Transportation Alliance's Transportation Procurement Strategy, and the Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Procurement Manual for Activities Funded Through the National Land Transport Programme.

For services that do not receive funding through the National Land Transport Programme, but do receive funding through a regional targeted transport rate,

these services will be tendered and contracted in accordance with the requirements of the Northland Transportation Alliance's Transportation Procurement Strategy.

Expenditure on public transport

Whangārei district

Council contributes financially to CityLink Whangārei, Bream Bay Link, Hikurangi Link and Whangārei Heads Link through a targeted transport rate. The estimated total targeted transport rate amounts to \$1,015,162 for the 2020/21 financial year. The fixed targeted transport rate is currently set at \$23.20 for each separately used or inhabited part rating unit in the Whangārei district.

For Whangārei, this targeted rate also includes administration and contract management, promotions and timetable information for bus services, and contract management for the Total Mobility scheme.

Whangārei District Council pays the local share of fares for the Total Mobility scheme.

Far North district

Council contributes financially to Far North Link, Mid North Link and Hokianga Link services in the Far North district through a targeted transport rate that covers operating costs for those services. The total targeted transport rate for the Far North amounts to \$319,533 for the 2020/21 financial year. The fixed targeted transport rate is currently set at \$8.60 for each separately used or inhabited part rating unit in the Far North district.

For the Far North district, this targeted rate also allows for management and promotion of the services and contains provision to implement some of the findings expected to come out of the newly completed Northland Transport Needs Investigation.

Kaipara district

To date there has been no targeted transport rate introduced for the Kaipara district, in order to provide contracted bus services or Total Mobility scheme services.

Total expenditure

Projected figures in the Regional Land Transport Plan 2021-2027 show the total spending on public transport services in Northland up to 2027.

	2021 - 2023	2023 - 2025	2025 - 2027
Projected total spend	\$9,850,438	\$11,064,321	\$11,665,722

Figures are based on a total cost to provide (national and regional share), planning, management, monitoring and reporting on all services, and allow for an estimated rate of inflation of 2.2%

Operational policies

Policy 1: Regional farebox recovery approach

Council must show how it aims to recoup from users a "fair and equitable" amount of what it costs to operate contracted public transport services. What is fair and equitable in Northland differs to what a service in a highly populated city can be expected to recoup.

Council is conscious that many of BusLink's passengers would struggle to pay more than they are now for regular bus travel. The low socio-economic nature of our region means council will strive to keep fares affordable, relative to the community the services operate in.

Regional farebox recovery ratio

In the past, NRC was required to have in place a formal regional farebox recovery ratio, calculated with a formula provided by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. The ratio calculation was complicated, but put simply, total revenue from on-board ticket sales (and any other income such as sponsorship) was deducted from the total cost of services contracted across Northland by council, divided by the cost to provide the service and multiplied by 100%. This gave a percentage of revenue recovery against the cost of services.

This was not considered a fair reflection, as with the exception of CityLink Whangārei, all Northland services operate over sparsely populated rural areas – therefore the regional ratio was extremely low.

CityLink Whangārei was close to achieving the then nationally required target of 50% farebox recovery until 2014/2015 when fare paying passengers began to decline in numbers.

This is attributed to:

- a corresponding decrease in fuel prices in 2015, making private car travel more affordable once again;

- relatively cheap or free parking in Whangārei CBD – this is still available today;
- more passengers becoming eligible for the SuperGold Card and its travel concession scheme (this trend is continuing in Northland);
- increases in operational costs (fuel and labour being the highest contributors in recent years) that were largely outside council and operator control (for example, the Employment Relations Act amendment which formalised drive and break times for drivers);
- from 2018 changes to CityLink Whangārei's ticketing systems saw fares reduced as the service was left with no ticketing system at short notice, and later was the first council to trial the new Regional Consortium Bee Card system (see Method 3 below for further detail); and
- a change in passenger type (and, therefore, fare paid). In the past, passengers could be almost evenly divided into three groups – adult fare paying, child fare paying and SuperGold card users.

The last two years have been challenging for all BusLink services in terms of farebox recovery. The economic impact of COVID-19 has impacted on the economic stability of Northland households particularly in the more rural areas. However, bus patronage in those areas has recovered strongly as residents have no alternative means of independent travel.

NRC will be reviewing all BusLink services (including CityLink Whangārei) in 2021/2022 with a view to completing the Waka Kotahi business case process in order to move trial services into the continuous programme of works. This is likely to require a rationalisation of each service (ie. removing poorly patronised trips) and undertaking fare reviews.

NRC will also be working with Whangārei District Council to achieve a reduction in private vehicle trips being made in Whangārei by improving the frequency and trip times for CityLink Whangārei (see Appendix 5: CityLink Whangārei Improvement Programme). This will include the provision of bus priority lanes in peak times, and a review of the parking management strategy.

There are several methods that council uses to try and increase farebox revenue:

Method 1: Improve operating efficiencies

Improvements to operating efficiencies will reduce costs and therefore improve farebox recovery. Council, in association with the transport provider, is constantly monitoring the costs and revenues of services and investigating how to improve operating efficiency. Services with trips showing poor passenger loadings will be identified and efforts made

to improve their performance. Changes may include better coordination and integration of services, which could be achieved through the likes of small timetable changes and/or route optimisation. Greater uptake of the Bee smartcard should also speed up boarding.

The impact of the rest and meal breaks legislation was mitigated in Whangārei by removing some trips that were carrying very few to no passengers and maintaining the contract price at its current level.

Council will be undertaking a major review of the service in order to implement the proposed improvement programme, to ensure poorly patronised trips are reallocated to where they are needed most.

Method 2: Increase patronage

Increasing patronage will increase revenues and, therefore, improve farebox recovery. Council will look to increase patronage by undertaking general and targeted publicity, as well as improving service quality through advocating for improving infrastructure, maintaining high vehicle-quality standards, and optimising routes and service levels to increase accessibility. As stated above, a major review will be undertaken to identify and implement improvements.

Method 3: Review of fare products and fare levels

Increasing fares will lead to more revenue and better farebox recovery. However, a delicate balance is required to manage potential negative effects on bus patronage. Small increases in fares may be required occasionally to cover the increases in costs of providing bus services. Other past options have included reviewing the availability and eligibility criteria for concession fares, reviewing the levels of discounts available, and seeking supplementary sources of funding. Council undertook a network review in 2014 and a fare structure review in 2018.

In 2018, Snapper Services (the electronic ticketing provider at the time) gave relatively short notice of their intent to no longer support the ticketing system they were providing for the CityLink fleet. Council was participating in the Regional Integrated Ticketing System (RITS) project, as part of a consortium that, on behalf of nine regional councils, procured a new ticketing system. When tendered, the RITS system was awarded to INIT, a German company offering ticketing systems across Europe and the United States.

As the new RITS (or Bee) smart card system was not ready, and council was in the unavoidable position of not having an on-board ticketing system, council approved a simple, reduced, cash-only structure. This was very well received and saw a slow but steady increase in passengers. This simplified fare structure

also allowed CityLink Whangārei to trial the new Bee system on behalf of the consortium, providing the opportunity to iron out minor operational bugs.

The decision at the time was to retain the current fare structure of \$1 for a child and \$2 for an adult, rather than implement multiple fare concessions, to try to simplify the testing process for the Bee system. It was also a way of thanking our customers for participating in the testing process with us, and for the minor inconveniences they occasionally experienced.

It is intended to keep these simplified fares in place in future. However, passengers may see an increase in cash-only fares (as Bee Card fares will be lower than cash fares), as we attempt to not only speed up boarding, but also learn where passengers are boarding and alighting to help with future planning.

Method 4: Urban farebox recovery – CityLink Whangārei

Statistics New Zealand defines ‘urban’ as settlements of more than 30,000 people and ‘rural’ areas with less than 30,000.

Farebox recovery for CityLink Whangārei

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Fare paying passengers	264,735	252,737	252,080	251,190	230,421	258,652	253,233
SuperGold card passengers	58,818	60,084	61,113	58,224	60,173	70,590	55,556
Total passengers	323,553	312,821	312,193	309,414	290,594	329,242	308,789
Ticket sales (cash & card)	\$561,383	\$545,875	\$532,062	\$515,250	\$476,666	\$397,669	\$372,623
SuperGold card reimbursement	\$99,501	\$101,883	\$102,560	\$96,764	\$98,048	\$85,607	\$101,174
Total farebox revenue	\$660,884	\$647,758	\$634,622	\$612,014	\$574,714	\$483,276	\$473,797
Cost of contract	\$1,403,691	\$1,419,604	\$4,428,771	\$1,454,469	\$1,614,283	\$1,799,844	\$1,799,844
Farebox recovery ratio	47%	45%	44%	42%	35%	27%	26%

Note: 2019/20 ticket sales include reimbursement from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for fares foregone during the COVID-19 lockdown period in March – May. Passenger numbers reflect actual passengers carried. Excludes CPI and GST.

Under this definition, Whangārei is the only Northland centre to be classed ‘urban’.

CityLink Whangārei is currently sitting at 30% farebox recovery. This is largely attributed to increasing numbers of students using the service at a reduced fare, which is affecting the farebox revenue. More and more parents are relying on the services as commercial and Ministry of Education-funded services are reviewed, and in some cases withdrawn. This leads to a reduced capacity in peak hours for adults paying full fare.

Any significant change in the price of oil has a direct correlation with changes in passenger numbers – as fuel prices increase, so do the number of people travelling by bus. As fuel prices drop, the number of passengers decreases.

In Whangārei, council will strive to raise the current farebox recovery ratio for the duration of this plan, with a target of increasing fare revenue by 5% per annum. A target of 30% has been set for the improvement programme.

Method 5: Rural farebox recovery – all other BusLink services and trials

This would see the following ratios applied to rural services:

- 1 to 3 years – 25% farebox recovery ratio (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency 37.5%, council 37.5%);
- 4 to 6 years – 30% farebox recovery ratio (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency 35%, council 35%);
- 7+ years – 35% farebox recovery ratio (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency 32.5%, council 32.5%).

At the time of compilation, the ratio of regional services varied between 20% and 30%.

This approach provides a fair and equitable method of accounting for the challenges of running a bus service in rural areas, which account for two-thirds of Northland's population.

In Northland it is considered important to retain affordable passenger fares to maintain and grow patronage. Fares that are too high have been proven to result in a corresponding decrease in passenger numbers. This will be particularly relevant for socially and economically deprived communities in Northland. Similarly, councils in Northland have limited funding bases.

SuperGold Card scheme funding

Financial Year (Jul – Jun)	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
% of fare reimbursed	0.65%	0.65%	0.65%	0.65%	0.65%	capped	capped
Passengers	58,818	60,084	60,113	58,224	60,173	70,590	58,307
Expenditure	\$99,738	\$101,902	\$101,932	\$99,863	\$103,851	\$123,679	\$114,855

Council's current methodology is to bulk-claim the annual allocated budget (as per Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency procedures) and continue 'allocating' 65% of the equivalent fare for a SuperGold passenger carried on an eligible service, up to the maximum amount of funding allocated to it for the SuperGold Card scheme. **Note:** The 2019/20 number of passengers travelling were affected by COVID-19. The number of cardholders travelling reduced significantly during the various alert levels, and at the time of writing have not yet returned to pre-COVID numbers.

An application for any additional funding can only be made at year-end, once Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency can assess all SuperGold Card holder travel across the country. As there is no guarantee that additional funding will be approved, council must manage the scheme prudently, whilst ensuring fair allocation across the region.

Policy 2: SuperGold Card scheme funding allocation policy

SuperGold Card scheme

Since the introduction of the SuperGold Card scheme in 2008, passenger uptake has increased across the country to the point that the government, through scheme reviews in 2010 and 2015, has determined a cap will be placed on the amount of funding available to reimburse councils for the cost of providing transport to SuperGold Card holders.

Historically the scheme has only been available in Northland for urban, contracted bus services. Until 2015, Northland Regional Council was reimbursed 65% of the full fare for those SuperGold Card holders who travel off-peak (between 8.50am and 3.10pm, after 6.00pm and anytime over the weekend).

From the commencement of the June 2018 – June 2021 Regional Land Transport Programme, councils are bulk funded up to a maximum amount claimed and allocated to all eligible BusLink services.

Current funding levels

The approved allocation for 2019/20 is \$114,855, which is less than the 2017/18 allocation of \$123,679. The forward allocation for 2020/21 has now been confirmed as \$83,475, as a direct result of the drop in actual SuperGold Card holders travelling from March 2020 onwards.

For Northland, this is currently enough to partially reimburse council for the existing travel by CityLink Whangārei SuperGold Card holders, with a small reimbursement for Mid North Link, Hokianga Link and Far North Link SuperGold Card holders.

It should be noted here that if additional off-peak buses were required to be added because of large loadings, these would come at a greater cost to council because of the reduced farebox revenue.

Future services

Currently, Bream Bay Link is not approved by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency to offer the free concessionary SuperGold Card travel. The trial has shown that around 75% of passengers utilising the service now would likely be SuperGold Card holders.

NRC is also running trial services for Hikurangi and Whangārei Heads. As with Bream Bay Link, SuperGold Card free travel will not be offered on these trials, to allow council the opportunity to gather data on passenger type to support an application to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for additional funding.

Council will continue to negotiate the inclusion of these services if they continue beyond their initial 12-month trial period.

New services

New services entering the SuperGold Card scheme must meet the following Ministry of Transport conditions:

- must be contracted to a regional council;
- are not identified as an exempt service; and
- are identified within a Regional Public Transport Plan.

Ferry services currently operating in Northland are not contracted to council, therefore are fully commercial services. Commercial services are identified by legislation as exempt services, meaning they cannot claim reimbursement from the SuperGold Card scheme for carrying SuperGold Card holders.

A legacy issue means some niche services that are now classified as exempt services were, and still are, included in the scheme. This has created an anomaly where those services receive reimbursement for carrying SuperGold Card holders where they would not normally be eligible.

These services included Auckland ferry services, the Wellington Cable Car and Wellington's Airport Flyer. These services have had restrictions put in place, including now only being able to claim up to a capped amount.

Policy 3: Community vehicle trusts policy

Community vehicle trusts

Council has been seeking alternatives to scheduled contracted bus services for those parts of Northland that have no other form of transport.

Environment Canterbury (ECan) has developed a successful model known as community vehicle trusts, which has been in existence for more than 20 years. There are currently 15 vehicle trusts operating across Canterbury in areas outside the urban public transport network.

Vehicle trusts are run by volunteers, who group together to form a registered trust, and the trust operates under a memorandum of understanding with ECan. Operating costs are generally covered by a modest mileage fee to passengers, and ECan provides an annual grant of \$10,000, which is funded by regional council rates and central government taxes.

Vehicle trusts utilise the goodwill of the community by recruiting volunteer drivers, meaning transport is more affordable and meets the needs of customers.

Council would welcome applications from anyone who would like to be involved in replicating this model somewhere in Northland that is not currently serviced by council's contracted bus services.

There are certain criteria:

- there must be no other NRC-contracted transport services operating in the area;
- there must be a demonstrated need for a transport service;
- there must be a core group of volunteers who agree to provide the transport service, and who are willing to undergo a medical and police check (at council's cost); and
- there must be demonstrable administrative experience within the core group to administer the trust and to manage bookings and rosters.

Council will, in the first instance:

- plan (and budget) for up to three vehicle trusts to be set up in rural Northland as a pilot;
- provide consultant advice and support in the trust formation;
- provide administrative support and training for the initial set-up (ongoing costs will be the responsibility of the trust); and
- provide documentation templates (including reporting and annual business planning).

On receiving the trust registration papers, NRC will then:

- provide a one-off initial grant of \$20,000 (excluding GST) to that trust. This may be utilised to buy a suitable vehicle to be used for providing community transport, or in the event a vehicle is already available, could be used for access improvements such as a hoist installation.

Once the first 12 months of operation have been completed successfully (success will be determined by how much fares have contributed to the annual operating costs) and the trust can show it is willing to continue, and has recruited enough volunteers with the necessary skills to continue, council will:

- provide an annual grant of \$10,000 per annum to be utilised for vehicle replacement and/or administration costs.

Further information on the scheme can be viewed here on the [Environment Canterbury website](#).

A regional workshop will be held on this concept if asked for as a result of this plan's consultation process.

Policy 4: Special events public transport policy

Council will work with territorial authorities and other organisations to facilitate the use of existing public transport services, or to provide transport, to and from special events or promotions in the region.

Where possible, notification of events at which public transport could be considered beneficial should be provided to council in the early organisation stages. Major events should be advised in adequate time for staff to apply for funding (if needed) in the Annual Plan or Long Term Plan process, and to make a request to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for funding assistance.

Council will encourage territorial authorities to ensure the provision of public transport is adequately considered in event traffic management plans.

Uptake of public transport to special events is likely to be low unless passengers enjoy a visible advantage to the movements of private vehicles (ie. are given some priority and not sitting in the same traffic queues).

Commercial (profit-making) events

Funding is **not** available for public transport services to and from commercial events. However, the transport operations team is available to assist organisers with utilising existing public transport services.

Examples of commercial events in Whangārei include the Fritter Festival, Beach to Basin and sporting events at the stadium, and any other events with an admission, entry or ticket charge.

NRC would, however, consider working with organisers of commercial events who include the cost of transport provision in the event ticket prices, on

the understanding that the transport component of the ticket price will be forwarded to council to contribute to the cost of services provided.

Non-commercial (non-profit-making) events

Funding **may** be available for public transport services to and from non-commercial community events on a co-funding basis:

1. Where council funding support is sought, event organisers will be required to submit a written application to outline the benefits and costs of public transport provision to and from the event.
2. Council will require event organisers to fund one-third of the cost of the special event public transport in a three-way partnership with the council and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.
3. If there is no subsidy available from Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, costs will be split between council and the event organiser.
4. Council will consider the applications on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the following:

a. Eligibility criteria:

- The event is a community event with free entry for attendees.
- The event is expected to attract more than 5,000 attendees.
- The event must take place within council's boundaries.

If these criteria are met, an application can be lodged with council. Applications will be reviewed by the transport operations team.

b. Assessment criteria

- nature and extent of bus service required to support the event
- likely cost of providing the bus services
- available budget to meet the cost of providing the bus service
- potential impacts of not having a public transport service to the event
- likely benefits of the event, including indirect benefits for the wider community
- alignment with this plan's priorities and objectives
- potential impact that special event bus services may have on regular public transport bus services.

Each criteria would be given a high, medium or low rating, along with the supporting rationale, to help inform any decision on whether to support the community event through the provision of public transport funding and services.

(The transport operations team acknowledges the assistance of other regional councils in the preparation of this policy.)

Policy 5: Fare review policy

Councils are encouraged by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency to have clear objectives included in this plan that outline how their fare policies will deliver and balance three strategic objectives:

- financial stability;
- transport system efficiency; and
- greater equity.

At the same time, councils are also encouraged to maintain a strong focus on fare revenue management and cost recovery.

Council has held fares at current levels for most services for the past two years. In previous years, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency has required councils to strive to recover 50% of the service cost from passenger fares. This has proven to be unsustainable, particularly in areas – such as Northland – with a high deprivation index.

CityLink Whangārei has, in the past, achieved a recovery from fares of almost 50% of the cost to provide this service. This has dropped in recent times, primarily because there are now more students paying half-price fares travelling in peak than there are full-fare paying adults.

Council will undertake an annual fare review at the conclusion of each financial year. Such an approach will look at:

- the farebox recovery ratio, including the ability to maximise farebox revenue without unduly disadvantaging passengers (services should be affordable for passengers)
- affordability indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and other socio-economic indicators
- service running costs, including the price of fuel and indexation of contract prices
- any other relevant factors, ie. council's objectives and aspirations for public transport in the region.

Council will undertake a fare structure review every six years. This will review the:

- suitability, and therefore the future of, the flat-fare model for CityLink Whangārei
- structure and price of zoned fares for rural services
- suitability of different fare types (eg. single, transfer, concession fares, peak/off-peak fares, discount rates).

CityLink Whangārei

CityLink Whangārei utilises the Bee Card electronic ticketing system. This system has been implemented across nine councils over the past two years, and offers councils the opportunity to:

- speed boarding times by reducing single ticket cash purchases;
- automatically link entitlement to free SuperGold Card travel to new Bee Cards;
- more accurately manage the network; and
- investigate and, where possible implement, fare incentives to increase Bee Card use.

Other Buslink services

These services operate with smaller vehicles across long distances between rural communities. These are cash only services, with fares structured to aim to recover a minimum of 30% of the cost of providing the services. At this time the cost to purchase and install electronic ticketing machines on these vehicles is not considered viable, due to these services presently having annual contract renewals, and most still being considered "trials" meaning they are subject to changing routes and timetables.

At roughly the same time as the fare review is undertaken, council will also look to remove poorly patronised trips.

Policy 6: Requests for new or amended bus services

This plan sets out what services council is proposing to provide in Northland, and what commercial (non-subsidised) services are in operation. This is reviewed every three years, with a re-write at least every six years.

The Regional Land Transport Plan is Northland's funding application to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for financial assistance or subsidies to help fund the cost of eligible projects and services (roading and passenger transport). This is compiled every six years, with a three-year review. Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency currently subsidises up to 54% of the net cost of bus services in Northland.

Council encourages any requests from the public for new or amended bus services to be submitted during the consultation process for the Regional Public Transport Plan.

This enables council to consult with ratepayers on their willingness to pay either the local share or, in the event Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency declines the subsidy application, the full cost of the service being requested, during the Annual Plan or Long Term

Plan process, which follows shortly after the consultation processes for the Regional Public Transport Plan and the Regional Land Transport Plan.

On occasion, council can approve additional expenditure if a high number of requests for a particular service are received during the Annual Plan or Long Term Plan process. However, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency subsidies cannot be guaranteed, as this would fall outside the funding application cycle.

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency assesses any proposed services for funding assistance based on a number of criteria, which can vary depending on the current government's transport priorities. It can be difficult to receive subsidies for rural services, which cover large areas across low population densities, resulting in low farebox revenue. However, in recent years there has been a marked increase in funding of rural trial services in Northland.

Council staff will provide the following information to assist the decision making:

- suggested route, days and times of operation (often up to three scenarios)
- suggested fares and estimated farebox revenue (often up to three scenarios)
- estimated service costs, broken down to two scenarios: full cost to ratepayers, and shared cost between ratepayers and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency
- evidence of community willingness to pay, and confirmed local share via the targeted rate.

New services will be introduced on a trial basis, lasting from 12 to 36 months. The service operator must be contracted to council for the term of the trial. Council is required to comply with the Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency procurement process, as contained

in the most recent version of the Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency Procurement Manual. Depending on the scale of the service, council will either directly appoint a local operator to provide the service or be required to undertake a more formal tender process.

Service patronage and costs will be reported to council monthly, and staff will review progress at six and nine months. Minor operational improvements may be made during the trial period (eg. route and/or timetable). If patronage is particularly poor, council reserves the right to withdraw the trial service completely.

Continuing services beyond the initial 12-month trial period, and often a subsequent second trial phase where minor amendments may be made to the route or timetable, depends solely on community support and patronage. Council will apply to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for a continued subsidy, and if the service carries good numbers of people, council will plan for a move from trial status to the council's baseline (permanent) programme.

If ratepayers remain willing to be rated for the local share costs, it will form part of the continuous programme of works, and council will apply to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for continued subsidy. Services may be reviewed and rationalised further if patronage is poor, or if improvements can be made.

Staff will continue to monitor and report on passenger numbers. The rate set may occasionally need to increase as a result of operating more kilometres, or the higher cost of operating (such as increasing fuel and labour costs, or a vehicle or fleet upgrade).

Part 5: Monitoring and review

Northland Regional Council intends to monitor the implementation of this plan on an ongoing basis. A review was undertaken in 2017 and it was planned that further reviews would take place on three-year cycles until 2024, when a new plan would be prepared.

However, given the increasing level of investment being proposed for CityLink Whangārei, this plan is being rewritten in 2020/21 in order to consult with affected Whangārei district ratepayers on their willingness to support the increased rate required.

Future reviews will be undertaken concurrently with reviews of the Regional Land Transport Plan. The review of the Regional Public Transport Plan may determine that no significant change to the plan is necessary (having regard to the Significance Policy).

When integrated into the programme, the new measures, as outlined in Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Investment Decision Making Framework (see Appendix 2), will also add to the monitoring key performance indicators listed below. Work continues on incorporating these new measures within our draft funding applications, and this plan will be updated as required to reflect the new measures developed and agreed.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the plan will be undertaken using the following key performance indicators:

Service delivery performance indicators for each bus service, as reported in Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Transport Investment Online (TIO):

- patronage – total public transport boardings and by category;
- passenger km – total passenger kilometres travelled;
- farebox revenue – farebox revenue by time period;
- service reliability – scheduled trips completed in full;
- service punctuality – at trip start, en-route and destination;
- customer satisfaction – for public transport users;
- disability access – proportion of services with disability access; and
- patronage growth – total patronage growth on all services.

Public Transport Operating Model performance indicators:

- contract negotiations;

- average number of qualifying bids/tenderers;
- percentage of tenders with only one bid; and
- operator turnover of contracts.

Procurement measure performance indicators:

- reporting timeliness – number of supplier reports delivered within timeframes;
- service inputs – in-service bus hours and kilometres delivered;
- safety and security – maintenance of an up-to-date incident register;
- fleet composition – adhering to fleet composition as outlined in contract;
- complaints – percentage cleared within ten working days; and
- take into account changes in the number of dwellings and/or employees within walking distance of public transport bus stop.

Amendments and variations to this plan

This plan can be varied at any time. However, if a variation is found to be 'significant' under the Significance Policy, consultation will be required^[1].

The approach to consultation will reflect the level of significance of any proposed variation. Consideration will be given to the costs and benefits of any consultative process or procedure, and the extent to which consultation has already taken place.

If the significance threshold is not met, the special consultative procedure will not need to be followed.

[1] Section 83 of the Local Government Act (2002) in accordance with s20(1) and s125 of the Land Transport Management Amendment Act (2013)

Significance Policy

Purpose

Section 120(4) of the Land Transport Management Act 2003 (the act) requires this plan to set out the policy that Northland Regional Council will apply when determining whether a proposed variation is significant.

For variations that are deemed to be significant, the act requires Northland Regional Council to follow the consultation principles outlined in section 125 of the act[1].

[1] Section 83 of the Local Government Act (2002) in accordance with s20(1) and s125 of the Land Transport Management Amendment Act (2013)

General determination of significance

The significance of variations to this plan will be determined on a case-by-case basis. When determining the significance of a variation, consideration must be given to the extent to which the variation:

- signals a significant material change to the planned level of investment in the public transport network;
- impacts on the purpose of the Land Transport Management Amendment Act 2013;
- affects residents (variations with a moderate impact on a large number of residents, or variations with a major impact on a small number of residents will have greater significance than those with a minor impact); and
- affects the integrity of this plan, including its overall affordability.

Significant and non-significant matters

Matters that will always be considered 'significant' are:

- any variation that amends this policy on significance;
- any variation that introduces or amends a control or a contracting requirement.

Matters that will always be considered 'not significant' are:

- minor editorial and typographical amendments to this plan;
- minor changes to fare levels in accordance with current policy and funding levels.

Matters that will usually be considered 'not significant' are:

- a matter that has already been consulted on, ie. the addition, removal or amendment of any matter that has already been consulted on in accordance with the special consultative procedure;
- minor changes to the description of services following a service review, eg. changes to the

frequency and hours of a service that result in the same, or better, level of service; and

- changes to the description of services or grouping of services as a result of an area-wide service review, provided that there is no significant increase in cost.

Where Northland Regional Council determines that a proposed variation is not significant, council will still undertake targeted consultation as follows:

- consultation for minor changes in the delivery of public transport services;
- minor changes in service delivery that are required to improve efficiency, such as the addition or deletion of trips and minor route changes, and have only a local impact (in these cases, consultation will generally be undertaken at a low level with the operator/s involved, the relevant territorial authority and passengers who use the services);
- other non-significant variations; and
- any proposals for changes that affect only a sector of the community or the industry (eg. a change in Total Mobility provision, or a change to specific vehicle-quality standards) will be worked through with those most likely to be affected, as well as other relevant stakeholders.

Appendix 1: Compatibility matrix between high-level outcomes / results of national and regional documents

Public Transport Relevant Long Term Results from the Government Policy Statement for Land Transport 2021/22-2030/31	Regional Land Transport Plan for Northland (2021-2027)	Regional Public Transport Plan (2015 – 2025)	Northland Regional Council Long Term Plan (2015-2025)
Better Travel Options Providing people with better transport options to access social and economic opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northland has a resilient transport network that strengthens all parts of the transport system and enables economic and social development in Northland in a timely and sustainable manner. The people of Northland have transport choices to access jobs and amenities, and they are well informed of these choices. Improve integration of transport needs in land use planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An effective, affordable and sustainable bus network in, and linking, main centres with easily sourced timetable and travel information Reliable travel times and safe transport choice for communities servicing employment areas, retail and public services People have access to shared transport options. Transport management, including public transport, is effectively incorporated into land use planning Consider the needs of the transport disadvantaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of service for transport increases in line with a move toward greater accessibility of public transport and fewer carbon emissions. Safe and effective transport networks connecting our region. A strong and sustainable regional economy
Safety Developing a transport system where no-one is killed or seriously injured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and build for human vulnerability, and encourage and promote safer choices and safer behaviour on our roads. Acknowledge and reflect the rich culture of Northland to enhance everything we do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliable travel times and safe transport choice for communities servicing employment areas, retail and public services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe and effective transport networks connecting our region.
Climate change Developing a low carbon transport system that supports emissions reductions, while improving safety and inclusive access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northland has a resilient transport network that strengthens all parts of the transport system and enables economic and social development in Northland in a timely and sustainable manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public transport in Northland contributes towards a reduction in carbon emission intensity of transport to assist in meeting the government's greenhouse gas targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resilient, adaptable communities in a changing climate. The level of service for transport increases in line with a move toward greater accessibility of public transport and fewer carbon emissions.

Public Transport Relevant Long Term Results from the Government Policy Statement for Land Transport 2021/22-2030/31	Regional Land Transport Plan for Northland (2021-2027)	Regional Public Transport Plan (2015 – 2025)	Northland Regional Council Long Term Plan (2015-2025)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people of Northland have transport choices to access jobs and amenities, and they are well informed of these choices. • Improve integration of transport needs in land use planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People have access to shared transport options. • Transport management, including public transport, is effectively incorporated into land use planning 	

Appendix 2: Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's Investment Decision Making Framework

The allocation of money from the National Land Transport Fund is managed by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency. Services for which councils are seeking a Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency subsidy must be evaluated according to the Investment Decision Making Framework (the framework) that has been developed by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency.

The framework enables Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency to consider the full range of costs and benefits relevant to investment decision making. Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency has developed a benefits framework to categorise and describe the various contributions of land transport to the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

The framework is aligned with the Ministry of Transport's Transport Outcomes Framework, as well as the New Zealand Treasury's Living Standards Framework. In brief, councils are required to show decision makers:

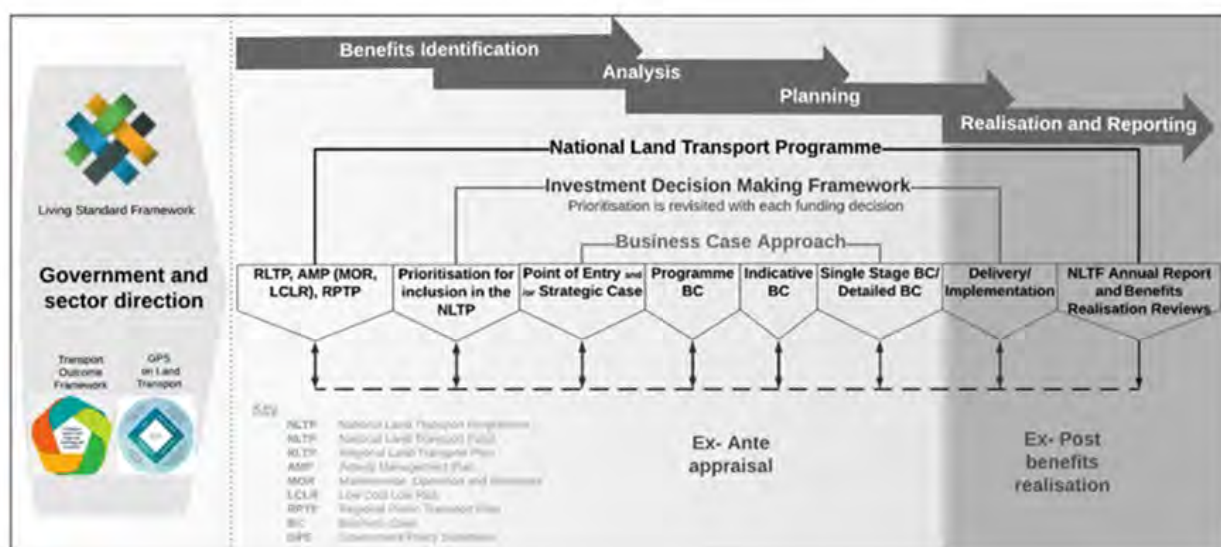
- benefits that cannot be easily measured, eg. impacts on community cohesion, which are

expressed in descriptive terms – qualitative benefits;

- benefits that can be expressed in numerical terms, eg. percentage of the population who use public transport – quantitative benefits; and
- benefits that can be expressed in dollar terms – monetised.

Benefits management includes the identification, analysis, planning, realisation and reporting of benefits. The aim of benefits management is to:

- ensure Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency invests in the things that matter to the government and the community;
- demonstrate an investment's contribution to outcome;
- ensure benefits are realistic, achievable and ultimately realised;
- ensure value for money;
- track the realisation of benefits after implementation; and
- embed lessons learned in order to continually improve.



COVID-19 has greatly affected the amount of funding available in the National Land Transport Fund. For example, revenue from petrol taxes shrunk, as New Zealanders could not freely travel around due to alert level restrictions.

It can difficult for councils to secure funding for smaller rural services, as these are often social services as opposed to services that provide access for employment opportunities. Increasing the frequency of transport services to create opportunities for people to work in horticulture or hospitality is expensive, and often unrealistic due to the long travel times and needing at least hourly departures between 5.00am and midnight.

In addition, ticket prices need to be kept at an affordable level to encourage patronage and make it more attractive to use services as opposed to private vehicles. This often means a low farebox recovery ratio, and when Northland service economics are compared against other regions at the time of moderation by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency, they risk falling below the cut-off line for subsidisation.

More information on the allocation of funding for passenger transport services can be found on the [Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency website](#).

Appendix 3: Current fares and timetabling on CityLink Whangārei

Correct as at May 2020

ROUTE 2: Onerahi	
Monday - Friday	6.05am to 6.15pm (half-hourly in peak, hourly off-peak)
Saturday	7.15 am to 4.15pm (hourly)
ROUTE 3: Tikipunga (via Kamo)	
Monday - Friday	6.30am to 5.15pm (half-hourly in peak, hourly off-peak)
Saturday	8.15am to 4.15pm (every two hours)
ROUTE 3A: Kamo (via Tikipunga)	
Monday - Friday	6.05am to 6.00pm (half hourly in peak, hourly off-peak)
Saturday	7.15am to 1.15pm (every two hours)
ROUTE 4: Otangarei	
Monday - Friday	7.00am to 5.40pm (half hourly in peak, hourly off-peak)
Saturday	8.35am to 3.40pm (hourly)
ROUTE 5: Morningside (via NorthTec)	
Monday - Friday	7.00am to 5.30pm (hourly)
Saturday	8.30am to 2.30pm (every two hours)
ROUTE 5A: Raumanga (via Morningside)	
Monday - Friday	6.30am to 6.00pm (hourly)
Saturday	7.30am to 3.30pm (every two hours)

ROUTE 6: Maunu	
Monday to Friday	7.00am to 6.00pm (hourly)
Saturday	7.00am to 4.00pm (hourly)
ROUTE 7: Fairway Drive	
Monday - Friday	7am, 8am, 10am, 12.30pm, 3.00pm, 4.30pm and 5.30pm
Saturday	8.00am to 4.00pm (every two hours)
ROUTE 8: Southern Express	
Monday - Friday	6.45am to 5.15pm (half hourly in peak, every two hours off-peak)
Saturday	8.00am to 4.00pm (every two hours)
FARES:	
Adult single	\$2.00
Child single	\$1.00 (a child is someone aged 5–15 years (inclusive), or someone who is still attending a secondary school and can produce a photo ID card as proof of attendance)
Under 5	Free

As of 6 May 2019, amendments to the Employment Relations Act have re-introduced strict requirements around rest and meal breaks for employees. This Act came into effect in May 2019, meaning all employees must receive set rest and meal breaks.

At the time of writing, council is awaiting a confirmed revised operational timetable for CityLink Whangārei, and the revised CityLink driver duties required to ensure the service complies with the Act.

Appendix 4: CityLink Whangārei – electric vehicles

Northland Regional Council transport staff are members of the Local Government Transport Special Interest Group (the group), which is made up of transport planning and operational staff from across New Zealand. The group meets regularly to share experiences, keep a watchful eye on trends, and to help each other respond to regulatory requirements and government priorities.

There are several workstreams in the group, one of which focuses on decarbonising the public transport fleet, a topic that also has the endorsement of the Regional Chief Executives' Forum.

This desktop investigation will pull together all current investigations and roadmaps developed by councils across New Zealand, identify knowledge gaps, and provide the opportunity to engage with Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and the Ministry of Transport on how to decarbonise public transport fleets. It will investigate options for ownership and procurement, as well as funding models, and will consider other key challenges such as charging infrastructure (ie. who owns and builds it), impact on timetables to allow re-charging, and the impact on the national grid.

Council transport staff intend to become members of the decarbonisation working group for two reasons: to increase regional knowledge of electrification of

the fleet, and to work with other larger councils with a view to leveraging savings for Northland (eg. by potentially procuring vehicles at the same time).

In September 2020, council agreed to send an early signal in the Long Term Plan 2021-2031 of its intent to formally consider replacing some, or even all, of the existing diesel CityLink fleet with electric buses at the time of re-tendering the CityLink contract.

The existing CityLink operating contract expires in late April 2027, which means the tendering process will commence approximately two years earlier, in April 2025.

As the findings of the decarbonisation workstream come together, council can develop its own electrification roadmap. This is likely to be aimed at CityLink Whangārei in the first instance, with a view to extending to other BusLink contracts if and when possible.

Appendix 5: CityLink Whangārei improvement programme

This sets out the draft CityLink Whangārei improvement programme required to support high-level passenger transport objectives, as contained in the Whangārei City Transportation Network Strategy.

Funding to support this step change is yet to be confirmed. An application has been made to Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency for subsidy, and the local share contribution is being consulted on during Northland Regional Council's Long Term Plan consultation in March 2021.

Detailed costings have only been provided for the short term (one to three years). Projects beyond this timeframe are yet to be agreed upon. The exact

frequency of the improvement is yet to be calculated, however, generally the proposal doubles existing services.

The estimate is based on current operating costs and excludes any premium that may be sought by tenderers to provide the required additional peak vehicles. The proposals will also be put through a scheduling programme to ensure optimum timetabling.

Investigating passenger rail services has been scheduled to be addressed in the longer-term planning cycle. The feasibility and viability of a passenger rail service in the region is unclear at this time, and at the least, CityLink Whangārei will need further improvement to connect with rail hubs and provide the final section of a passenger journey.

Strategy deliverable	Proposed level of service change (frequency)	Year of implementation	Gross costs (excl. assumed 30% farebox recovery)
<i>Short term (1 - 3 years)</i>			
Bus priority lane trial Kamo Road / Bank Street	15 mins peak	2022/2023 onwards	\$700,000
	30 mins off-peak Routes 3, 3A and 4		
	30 mins peak	2022/2023 onwards	\$315,000
	60 mins off-peak Route 7 Separate Kamo and Tikipunga and replace with loop service		
Bus priority lane trial Riverside Drive	15 mins peak 30 mins off-peak Route 2	2023/2024 onwards	\$465,750
Bus priority lane trial Maunu Road	15 mins peak 45 mins off-peak	2023/2024 onwards	\$189,000

Strategy deliverable	Proposed level of service change (frequency)	Year of implementation	Gross costs (excl. assumed 30% farebox recovery)
	Route 6		
<i>Medium term (4 - 10 years)</i>			
Raumanga, Morningside and Otaika services	15 mins peak 30 mins off-peak	2025/2026 onwards	
Bus priority lane trial Okara / Port Road	Dependent upon Port Nikau development	2026/2027 onwards	
<i>Long term (2030 - 2050)</i>			
Four laning and bus priority lanes: Reyburn / Okara Port Mill / Waiaataua / Kiripaka Roads Tarewa Road	Increase frequency to 10 mins at peak time and 20 mins off-peak	2030 onwards	
Investigate rural commuter services: Bream Bay Link Hikurangi Link	Off-peak once a week services extended to peak commuter services	2031/2032 onwards	
Rural commuter park-and-rides	30 mins peak 60 mins off-peak	TBC	
<i>Rail</i>			
Investigate commuter trains between Kamo and CBD and to Whangārei Port	To be developed	2040 onwards	

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