



ORATAIAO
SUBMISSION ON
INTER-REGIONAL
PASSENGER RAIL

October 2022

Submission on the inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand

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Foreword

Tēnā koe,

OraTaiao: NZ Climate and Health Council is pleased to see the Transport and Infrastructure Committee investigating passenger rail in Aotearoa NZ and welcome the opportunity to contribute on the implications for the health of people and the planet.

Our principal concerns are around equity, accessibility, integrated public and active transport across the country, and climate change.

Equity

Transport is a critical social determinant of health, and providing high-quality public transport can create benefits for both human and environmental wellbeing. Yet, New Zealand's reliance on private vehicle transport increases inequities in transport and health. Most people have no choice but to use cars even if they can ill afford to buy, fuel and maintain a vehicle. Low-income households are more likely to face transport disadvantages than others in the population because they often live in car-reliant areas (e.g. on the fringes of cities and in rural areas) and have higher and longer daily travel costs, which perpetuates a cycle of inequity.

Māori are more likely to live in a low-income household and live in areas with a lack of public transport, and so are more prone to transport poverty. Limited access to transport also impedes fulfilment of cultural and social obligations, and is a barrier to accessing sites for reaffirming cultural identity. A failure to address transport disadvantages for Māori is a major lost opportunity to improve health equity and adhere to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. On the other hand, interregional rail may provide improved opportunities to engage with cultural activities, which may be important for Māori living in urban areas with connections to rural sites¹.

Disabled people also tend to have lower incomes than average and experience more transport disadvantages than others in the population. Children also suffer from car-reliance, which reduces their independence and opportunities to socialise and learn. Cheaper cars are often the least safe, exposing their occupants to a higher risk of road traffic injury. Affordable inter-regional train services will provide safe transport options for all members of our community. Improving non-motorised transport options contribute to greater social equity and economic opportunities for people who may not have access to a car.

¹ https://www.knowledgehub.transport.govt.nz/assets/TKH-Uploads/HubPresentations/Indigenous-Maori-perspectives-on-urban-transport-patterns-linked-to-health-and-wellbeing_Jones-et-al.pdf

Accessibility

An equitable and just society will be accessible for all, including people living with disabilities of mobility, sight, hearing, and people of all ages. Reliance on car travel is a barrier. A rail network across the country that connects to other forms of public and active transport will enhance access to society for people living with disabilities.

Integrated public and active transport across the country

Research shows that public transport is much safer than travel by private vehicle. Waka Kotahi has adopted "Vision Zero." To achieve this, it must invest heavily in public and active transport. Many studies show that active transport is healthier for people than travel by private vehicle. Therefore, it is important for people's health and safety to be able to access a public and active transport network that can take them where they need to go.

Climate change

We take an intergenerational view of health and well-being. We are committed to being "good ancestors." This means we must transition away from the use of fossil fuels for transport. In Aotearoa New Zealand, a significant proportion of fossil fuels for transport are used for inter-regional travel by plane or private motor vehicle. There are significant barriers and costs to the wholesale electrification of the vehicle fleet. There are no viable non-fossil fuel inter-regional aircraft becoming available in the near future. Electrified inter-regional trains offer the best currently available and relatively affordable alternative to private vehicles and aircraft that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport. In addition, there are significant co-benefits for health, equity and safety as outlined above. Climate action through low-emissions transport like rail would make great inroads to addressing the second largest source of climate pollution in Aotearoa. If unaddressed, climate change will disproportionately impact Māori wellbeing through multiple pathways, and would not realise health equity as necessitated under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Conversely, protecting Māori communities by mitigating climate change will contribute to realising health equity and adherence to the articles of Te Tiriti.

Yours sincerely,



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Recommendations

Terms of reference (TOR)

TOR#1: Investigating possibilities and viability of passenger rail in underserved communities, those with prior rail links that have been disestablished, and those currently advocating for improved rail links.

- Orataiao strongly supports this TOR.
- Many of our rural communities lack access to affordable, safe, regular low emission transport. 85% of our population live in cities and districts accessible by rail.
- Underserved communities also include Māori, Pacific, elderly and disabled people. Inter-regional rail would increase access to transport for those who cannot afford or are unable to use a car.
- Active transport confers greater benefits² to Māori and elderly people and can increase health equity as per Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

TOR#4 Gaining insights into the integration of regional rail into existing local public transport networks.

- We strongly support this TOR. Rail to the centre of towns and cities and integration with active transport (cycle lanes and pedestrian routes) and other public transport (local bus networks) is crucial to the success of inter-regional passenger rail and achieving emissions reduction goals. This will also help realise many of the health and wellbeing co-benefits of active transport.
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TOR#5 Investigating the climate and emissions reductions possibilities of passenger rail, and how this links to VKT (vehicle kilometres travelled) reduction targets in the Emissions Reduction Plan and including electrification between regions.

- We strongly support this TOR.
- Development of an affordable, frequent, efficient, integrated and electrified inter regional train network would reduce VKT, a key goal of the Climate Change Commission.

² <https://www-sciencedirect-com.ezproxy.massey.ac.nz/science/article/pii/S2214140520301572?via%3Dihub>

- It is essential that the train networks become electrified across the country as there is evidence that fossil fuel powered long haul rail offers minimal or no reduction in per passenger emissions compared with aviation.
- It will be necessary for the train network to be integrated, affordable (subsidised) and reliable in order for people to make the mode-switch away from private vehicles.

TOR#6 Investigating potential rail expansions and investments in specific areas, such as Tauranga and the Lower North Island.

- We strongly support this TOR.
- The rail network requires considerable investment. Starting with expansions to major centres such as Tauranga and the Auckland to Wellington line would be a good start. We support expanding this TOR to rail extensions to regional centres throughout Aotearoa NZ.
- Overnight train services for the main centres in the North and South Island should be prioritised.
- A regular service from Picton to Invercargill via Christchurch and Dunedin should also be a specific area investigated for development

About OraTaiao

OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council is an organisation calling for urgent, fair, and Tiriti-based climate action in Aotearoa; we recognise the important co-benefits to health, well-being and fairness from strong and well-designed mitigative policies.

We honour Māori aspirations, are committed to the principles of te Tiriti o Waitangi, and strive to reduce inequities between Māori and other New Zealanders. We are guided in our practice by the concepts of kaitiakitanga (guardianship), kotahitanga (unity), manaakitanga (caring), and whakatipuranga (future generations).

OraTaiao has grown over a decade to more than 900 health professionals concerned with:

- The negative impacts of climate change on health, well-being, and fairness;
- The gains to health, well-being, and fairness that are possible through strong, health-centred climate action;
- Highlighting the impacts of climate change on those who already experience disadvantage or ill-health (i.e., equity impacts);
- Reducing the health sector's contribution to climate change.

As well as individual and organisational members, we are backed by 22 of New Zealand's leading health professional organisations for our Health Professionals Joint Call to Action on

Climate Change and Health (see https://www.orataiao.org.nz/friends_and_supporters). This support includes the New Zealand Nurses Organisation, Public Health Association, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine, plus numerous other specialist colleges. Together, these organisations represent tens of thousands of our country's health workforce.

As an organisational member of the Climate and Health Alliance, we work with a worldwide movement of health professionals and health organisations focused on the urgent health challenges of climate change - and the health opportunities of climate action. OraTaiao signed the Doha Declaration on Climate, Health and Wellbeing of December 2012, which reflects this international perspective.