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New Zealand Automobile Association Submission on the Variation to the Auckland Regional Public Transport Plan

The New Zealand Automobile Association (“NZAA”) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Auckland Transport on the Variation to the Auckland Regional Public Transport Plan Statement of Proposal (Proposal).

The NZAA is an incorporated society with 1.4 million members, including nearly 300,000 Auckland members. Originally founded in 1903 as an automobile users’ advocacy group, today the NZAA represents the interests of road users who collectively pay over \$2 billion in taxes each year through fuel excise, road user charges, registration fees, ACC levies, and GST. Through these payments, our Members make an important contribution to public transport capital and operating costs in Auckland and nationally.

NZAA’s advocacy focus in Auckland is on articulating the voice of the reasonable motorist on key transport infrastructure issues, and ensuring that the decisions over which projects to build and how to pay for them are shaped by value-for-money and principles of equity. Our goal is a safe, sustainable, and strategically aligned transport network that provides greater mobility options for our members and for all Aucklanders. An efficient and effective public transport system is a vital piece of this network.

The NZAA position

In general, we are supportive of the Proposal’s amendments regarding simplified zone fares, light rail, and the ferry development plan. However, we have some concerns that we would like to register.

Simplified zone fares

We support the approach that Auckland Transport is taking towards public transport fares and ticketing. We believe that the principles around simplicity, integration, affordability, and efficiency will improve the public transport experience for users as well as providing the opportunity for Auckland Transport to streamline processes and implement efficiencies.

The NZAA supports the introduction of simplified fares, as Auckland Transport will now charge public transport users based on the length of their journey and not the mode of transport that they use. Simplified fares correspond with the multi-modal approach that some public transport users undertake. Furthermore, we believe that by removing the need to purchase different bus, ferry, or rail tickets for each stage of the trip, the purchase process will be more user-friendly.

That said; we have concerns regarding cost inequity on short public transport trips that cross fare zones. For example, travelling from Westmere to Ponsonby, which despite being a short journey, will cost two zones. We believe it is unreasonable to charge a user the same for a trip from Westmere to Ponsonby as you would from Avondale to Bucklands Beach. We note that in some zone boundaries there are a zone fare overlaps. If Auckland Transport could extend the overlaps across all zone boundaries, so that there is more consistency differentiating the costs between short and long trips, this would go some way towards alleviating our concerns.

Auckland Transport has made a significant investment into integrated ticketing. We support incentivising the use of HOP card through discounted fares. Increasing the uptake of HOP card users will not only maximise the benefits of using an integrated system, but also allow users to switch public transport modes without financial penalty.

Fare evasion costs Auckland Transport over \$3 million in lost revenue per annum. The NZAA welcomes the initiatives to tackle fare evasion and ensuring that all users pay the correct fare.

Light rail

In our submission on the 2015-2025 Long Term Plan and Regional Land Transport Plan, the NZAA was critical of the inclusion of light rail as a public transport option as neither the Basic Transport Network nor the Auckland Plan Transport Network included it. The concerns that we raised in our submission remain, and are set out below:

- What evidence is there that light rail provides the transport solution for Auckland isthmus? The Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan heritage overlays limit the ability to intensify housing on the isthmus, therefore reducing the benefits of light rail.
- Considering the zoning provisions and heritage overlays, will there be the future population growth to justify light rail in the isthmus?
- Does light rail provide a significant enough capacity boost over the existing busway networks along the main arterials to justify the significant investment?
- Instead of light rail, could the public transport New Network, or modifications to it, allow bus services to act as feeders to the rail services dotted around the vicinity of the isthmus or work in tandem with express services to the CBD?
- What would the likely approach be to any public private partnership for the delivery of light rail?

We will need Auckland Transport to address these issues before we are able to form an opinion on light rail. Furthermore, if Auckland Transport does choose to progress light rail, we expect to see a rigorous business case publically released that outlines amongst other things, the rationale, costs, procurement methodology, services, and required infrastructure.

Despite our concerns about light rail and the haphazard manner in which Auckland Transport has introduced it into Auckland's transport conversation; we support the rationale for including it in the Proposal. It is important that Auckland Transport gives early signals and provides the opportunity for public and stakeholder engagement before determining its position on light rail.

Ferry development plan

Ferries play a small, but important role connecting the inner city and outlying suburbs to the CBD. We can see from Auckland Transport's Monthly Indicators Report, that while coming off a small base, ferry patronage is growing. We assume that it will continue to grow with the development of suburbs like Hobsonville Point.

Overall, we support the focus on improving existing services and infrastructure before looking at expanding the network. It is crucial that there is greater integration and alignment between the ferry and bus services. We also support the focus on improving ferry infrastructure as a number of services use infrastructure that is not user-friendly. For example, ferries to destinations like Waiheke, Beach Haven, and Hobsonville use the open-air piers at the Downtown Ferry Terminal, which are vulnerable to poor weather conditions.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding our concerns about light rail, the NZAA generally supports the proposed amendments to the Regional Public Transport Plan. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with Auckland Transport any of the points that this submission raises.

Yours sincerely

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