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Via email: transport.submissions@orc.govt.nz

SUBMISSION TO OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL ON THE DRAFT OTAGO REGIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT PLAN 2025-2035

Thank you for the opportunity to present this submission on the draft Otago Regional Public Transport Plan 2025-2035 (**RPTP**).

The Queenstown Lakes District Council (**QLDC**) supports Otago Regional Council's (**ORC**) work on the RPTP as it sets out the long-term planning for public transport in the region. QLDC values the early engagement that has been undertaken in developing the RPTP, and on related work such as the Queenstown Public Transport Business Case.

QLDC reiterates that a significant transformation in public transport is necessary to achieve the required mode shift in the district. It is encouraging to see the proposed improvements to routes and frequencies in both the short to medium and long term. QLDC encourages ORC to continue to proactively invest in the key public transport routes and destinations to and from the Queenstown town centre in order to stay ahead of demand and to encourage the required modal shift due to the finite capacity of the roading network.

Key points that are elaborated on further in the body of this submission include:

- The RLTP should further recognise and provide for resident and visitor growth of the Queenstown Lakes District (**QLD**). This growth has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the ability of the district's transport network to operate efficiently and effectively, resulting in increased travel time and decreases in reliability and resilience.
- Regarding proposed fare increases, QLDC encourages increasing the private share over rises in farebox recovery, and in the alternative, that ORC minimise any fare increases as much as possible. The introduction of public transport zones in the QLD is not supported.

It should be noted that due to the timeline of the process, this submission will be ratified by the Infrastructure Committee retrospectively at their June committee meeting.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely,



Gavin Bartlett
Chair – Infrastructure Committee

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1.0 Context of the Regional Public Transport Plan in relation to QLDC

- 1.1 The Queenstown-Lakes District (QLD) has an average daily population of 70,205 (visitors and residents) and a peak daily population of 99,220. By 2053, the population is forecast to more than double to 150,082 and 217,462 respectively¹.
- 1.2 This rapid growth is placing significant pressure on the district's transport network. QLD is facing increasing traffic congestion as rapid development outpaces the capacity of the road network. Geographical limitations mean there is limited scope to expand the district's road network. Accordingly, the network must be utilised more efficiently to transport an increasing number of people and goods. Encouraging active and alternative modes of transport, including public transport, discouraging single-occupancy private motor vehicles, and encouraging commuting outside peak periods all play an important role.
- 1.3 If significant mode shift away from single occupancy vehicles is not achieved, much of the transport network will reach gridlock². By 2028, it is predicted that peak travel periods on SH6A will be regularly gridlocked at morning and afternoon peak hours with car and public transport travel times between Lake Hayes Estate and Queenstown exceeding 60 minutes. This projected gridlock will have a significant negative impact on the economic productivity of the district, liveability for residents, and the visitor experience.
- 1.4 Better Ways to Go Mode Shift Plan outlines the district's planned approach to achieving the required mode shift away from single occupancy vehicles. The need for mode shift towards more sustainable transport is also outlined in QLDC's Travel Demand Management Single Stage Business Case (**SSBC**), the Queenstown Lakes Climate and Biodiversity Plan and the Wānaka Network Optimisation SSBC. ORC's Queenstown Public Transport Business Case also states that to maintain a functioning transport network in Queenstown, significant mode shift to public transport is required.
- 1.5 The QLDC Spatial Plan was developed through the Grow Well Whaiora partnership between central government, Kāi Tahu, QLDC and ORC. It supports and promotes well-functioning urban environments by ensuring that urban development areas are designed in a way that enables good accessibility, reduces travel needs and supports sustainable travel options such as public transport³.
- 1.6 ORC, QLDC and Central Otago District Council have also partnered to apply to central government for a Regional Deal. Transforming transport is one of the five priority packages. The application proposes mass rapid transit as part of achieving efficient and resilient transport for the region in the long term⁴. Additionally, a sub-regional public, an on-demand transport service connecting Alexandra, Cromwell, Wānaka and Queenstown that provides options for residents and visitors is identified.
- 1.7 The transportation sector is also the most significant source of greenhouse gas emissions within the district, creating 47% of emissions.⁵ QLDC's Climate and Biodiversity Plan strives to reduce emissions, prepare for

¹ <https://www.qldc.govt.nz/community/population-and-demand>

² [Queenstown Public Transport Business Case | Otago Regional Council](#)

³ [Spatial Plan - QLDC](#)

⁴ [1a-proposal-final-for-review.pdf](#) at page 27.

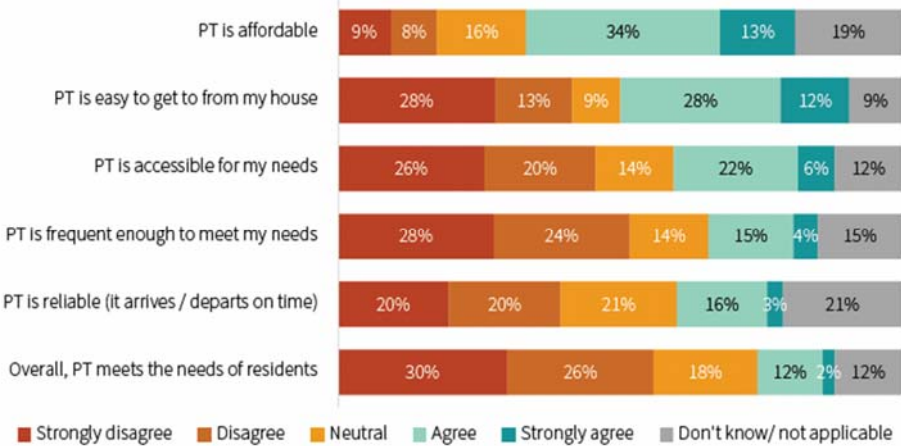
⁵ Carbon Zero Discussion Paper at page 6. Regenerative Tourism By 2030 (queenstownnz.co.nz)

climate adaptation and undertake biodiversity restoration. The plan pursues a low-emission transport network and a collaborative approach to travel behaviour change.

2.0 The focus areas in the plan are supported, but could better recognise key public transport issues

- 2.1 QLDC agrees with the focus areas outlined in the draft RPTP, and supports the actions outlined to enable improvements to reliability and frequency of services. It is submitted that the priorities could better recognise some of the determinants of public transport usage.
- 2.2 Frequency and reliability of the network are key priorities for passengers that could be more explicitly addressed in the policies and actions sitting under the priorities. The QLD’s annual Quality of Life survey found that only 14% of respondents in the district agreed that public transport met their needs in 2024. Table 1 below shows that currently only 15% of respondents viewed that public transport is frequent enough and 21% that it is reliable. Accordingly, it is recommended that there is more specific attention to these issues in the RTPT’s policies and actions. QLDC is committed to working with ORC towards a more efficient network that encourages public transport use together.

Table 1: Perceptions of public transport (PT) across the QLD



- 2.3 There are other topics that QLDC would like to see considered in the draft RPTP with recommendations on how they will be addressed. The common thread between these is that the RPTP should recognise and proactively provide for the significant rate of resident and visitor growth in the QLD. This growth has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the ability of the district’s transport network to operate efficiently and effectively, resulting in increased travel times and decreases in reliability and resilience. These topics include:

2.3.1 **Time of use charging** - central government is currently consulting on a time of use scheme for road charging. If implemented, this will make a regular, reliable and affordable public transport alternative to private vehicles even more important. We acknowledge and support the proposed changes in frequency to the QLD bus network but would like the RPTP to outline what a proactive approach to meeting the increased demands related to the implementation of time of use charging might look like.

2.3.2 **Te Putahi Ladies Mile development Masterplan** - The Masterplan was approved with the understanding that addressing congestion in this location can only be achieved through a range of land-use and mode shift interventions, given the limitations around existing capacity of roads and bridges that cannot be widened, due to existing urban development and natural

landscapes (i.e. airports and mountains). Key to this are public transport solutions. In particular, QLDC submits that Te Putahi Ladies Mile aligns with the urban form factors outlined in Appendix E of the draft RPTP such that detailed business planning for public transport to service this development is an urgent priority; failure to progress this is crucial and has serious implications, including delay of this development.

- 2.3.3 **Wānaka public transport** – While it is appreciated that a Wānaka connector service is still captured under the aspirations of the RPTP, it is disappointing that the Wānaka public transport business case is not being progressed after many years of advocacy from the community and QLDC. Over the course of two trials⁶, more than 1,300 rides were recorded, with users praising the service's reliability, affordability, and the friendliness of drivers. The trials also contributed to a reduction of nearly 49,000 kilometers in light vehicle travel. These initiatives provided valuable data to inform future public transport planning in the region.

While QLDC understands the pressures from a loss of central government co-funding and faces the same challenges, it is crucial that this work is prioritised and not abandoned. It remains the recommendation from QLDC and the Wānaka Upper Clutha Community Board that ORC work towards the commencement of Upper Clutha public transport services in year four of its Long Term Plan, and that the service initially focuses on transport between Hāwea, Wānaka and Luggate. QLDC acknowledges the role of land use planning and endeavours to work closely with ORC to ensure land use planning aligns with that needed to establish an efficient public transport system.

- 2.3.4 **Whakatipu ferry service scale back** - The inclusion of additional ferry services from Homestead Bay to Queenstown in the network aspirations is welcome, however the removal of planned ferry service improvements proposed in the draft ORC Annual Plan is not supported. QLDC considers this a missed opportunity to extend ferry services to address Queenstown's congestion challenges in growth locations, such as to and from Jacks Point/Hanley's Farm (Southern Corridor) to the Queenstown town centre. QLDC encourage ORC to consider and prioritise moving the planned date of these ferry services forward to proactively support the high growth along the Southern Corridor.

- 2.3.5 **Ministry of Education changes to school bus routes** – A smooth transition for the reduction in school bus routes and the shift to public transport for some tamariki is paramount. QLDC appreciates the consultation that has occurred to date on this matter, and acknowledges the challenges that ORC is navigating with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to enable additional capacity for school trips on an already over capacity public transport network. Working closely with QLDC is imperative to ensuring good outcomes for the safety of school children and the efficiency of the road network. QLDC therefore request that it is involved more closely with ORC and MoE in the ongoing discussions on the planned changes to school bus routes.

- 2.4 As noted at paragraph 1.7 above, transport is the main contributor to emissions in the QLD. The electrification of buses is therefore an important step to meet the district's climate targets that is supported. This action is closely interrelated with planning and delivery, travel demand management and

⁶ The Wānaka Community Shuttle Trial, was coordinated by Community Networks/LINK Upper Clutha with funding from QLDC Climate & Biodiversity Plan. The first trial ran from September to December 2022, offering a three-day-a-week service connecting Hāwea, Hāwea Flat, Albert Town, Three Parks, and the Wānaka CBD. The second trial, conducted from May to September 2023, expanded the service to five days a week, introducing an express route between Hāwea and Wānaka, as well as an intra-city loop within Wānaka.

mode shift away from private vehicles to more sustainable modes such as walking, cycling and public transport.

- 2.5 Good integration between public transport and active modes of travel are vital to support efficient journeys and promote more sustainable modes of transport. QLDC supports the inclusion and consideration of the means to carry bicycles and micro mobility on all scheduled services, however, it encourages ORC to include clear actions related to this. The current actions related to bicycle parking at bus stops and improved walking and cycling connections to public transport is supported but will not enable the significant mode shift that can be achieved through enabling people to carry their bicycles on their bus journey.
- 2.6 Further to paragraph 2.5 above and in relation to Action MMA4, it is recommended that a more proactive approach is adopted rather than waiting for evidence of demand. Without the appropriate infrastructure available, the demand won't be there.
- 2.7 With respect to the fifth priority in the RPTP of value for money, public transport needs to be considered as part of the whole transport system. Focusing solely on farebox recovery from public transport misses the benefits for the wider transport system and its users. Improved network efficiency from fewer cars on the road helps all road users even though they are not charged a public transport fare. Value for money from public transport therefore needs to be considered broadly.
- 2.8 Value for money can also be enhanced by robust planning and timely implementation. Consistent with the specific issues outlined above, the QLD is developing so rapidly, planning and implementing public transport for significant new developments is crucial. Waiting to implement a service until there is a high level of unmet demand misses the opportunity to instil positive mode choices from the outset. The available public transport service should be helping drive demand instead of waiting for it.

3.0 ORC support would make non-profit community transport services more viable but is only recommended as a longer-term option for rural or very small communities

- 3.1 The draft RPTP proposes providing funding to community vehicle trusts with volunteer drivers to supply on demand services. QLDC agrees that ORC support for non-profit community transport services will make them a more viable option. There is no definition provided for what qualifies as a smaller community, so it is unclear where it is envisaged this approach is being considered.
- 3.2 It is possible that Wānaka is being considered as a location for a non-profit community transport service, but as the RPTP does not define smaller communities, it is unclear if this applies to urban settings. If Wānaka is being considered for this option, QLDC contends that its size, rapid growth, density, and young population makes it far better suited to a more conventional public transport system, however it is amenable to this type of service as an interim measure to provide options for the community while a more formalised public transport network is developed.

4.0 Maintaining low base fares are an important incentive for public transport uptake and use

- 4.1 QLDC strongly encourages ORC to find other ways to increase the private share, through ways outlined in the funding actions on page 83, to try and retain the \$2 flat base fare, and in the alternative, to minimise any increase in fares as much as possible. The \$2 fare is responsible for much of the increase in public transport patronage in QLD in recent years, and these gains could quickly be lost with fare increases. There is an opportunity with upcoming increases in parking fees in the Queenstown town centre to shift more trips to public transport from single occupancy vehicles. Care must be taken if changes in public transport fees are implemented to avoid penalising patrons and deterring any increase in public transport patronage as a result of other travel demand management strategies like parking management.

- 4.2 QLDC supports ORC's proposal to continue children travelling for free and 13-18 years paying a 40% fare across the region.
- 4.3 QLDC does not support the introduction of zones in the QLD as this risks discouraging the uptake of public transport in the communities in the outer zones who traditionally have lower uptakes. Arrowtown in particular will be getting improved bus connections into the town centre in the next few months.
- 4.4 Further, QLDC considers it is important to consult separately on potential fare increases and zoning to better understand the impacts on patronage.

Recommendations:

R.1. QLDC supports the priorities outlined in the draft RTP, however submits that they could better recognise some of the determinants of public transport usage such as reliability and frequency.

R.2. Key issues that QLDC recommend are addressed in the RTP include (cf paragraph 2.3):

- how ORC will respond to the potential additional demand increases for public transport resulting from the implementation of **time of use charging**
- the need for detailed public transport planning now for **Te Putahi Ladies Mile** development
- prioritisation of **Wānaka public transport**
- prioritisation of improvements to **Whakatipu ferry services**
- a partnership approach with QLDC on **Ministry of Education changes to school bus routes**.

R.3. QLDC supports the inclusion and consideration of the means to carry bicycles and micro mobility on all scheduled bus services, however, it encourages ORC to include clear actions related to this.

R.4. A definition of what a 'smaller town' is requested with respect to the non-profit community transport services proposal. While QLDC is amenable to this proposal for the Upper Clutha as an interim measure, it should not replace the development of a more structured public transport system for this area.

R.5. QLDC encourages cost recovery by increasing the private share over rises in farebox recovery, and in the alternative, that ORC minimise any fare increases as much as possible.

R.6. The introduction of public transport zones in the QLD is not supported.

R.7. Changes to fares should be consulted on separately to the draft RTP to better understand the effects of fare changes on patronage.