

Submission on Marlborough District Council's Regional Public Transport Plan

17 March 2021

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Introduction

1. Nelson Marlborough Health (Nelson Marlborough District Health Board) (NMH) is a key organisation involved in the health and wellbeing of the people within Te Tau Ihu. NMH appreciates the opportunity to comment from a public health perspective on the Tasman District Council/Nelson City Council's Regional Public Transport Plan.
2. NMH makes this submission in recognition of its responsibilities to improve, promote and protect the health of people and communities under the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000 and the Health Act 1956.
3. This submission sets out particular matters of interest and concern to NMH including around accessibility, affordability and frequency of bus services.

General Comments

4. NMH supports the revised Regional Public Transport Plan (the Plan) that will create a reliable, attractive public transport services that services the broad area of Marlborough
5. Overall, NMH support the Plan which introduces a raft of changes relating to fares, route design and bus stops. As noted in the Plan, the local population is growing and also ageing, and it is important that the bus services can cater to the changing population. It is pleasing to see that the intended changes will result in a larger proportion of the region's residents having access to bus services.
6. Public transport is important because it provides people with an affordable and safe means of transport. The provision of public transport has a range of benefits by
 - a. increasing people's fitness and health, enabling people to more easily reach their daily physical activity targets as bus patrons are more likely to combine bus travel with walking or cycling as part of their commute.
 - b. reducing the need for individuals to own personal vehicles thus reduces vehicle emissions that affect respiratory health and contribute to greenhouse gases and climate change which will improve air quality.
 - c. reducing congestion, and creating a safer and more efficient road network.
 - d. enabling those who do not drive to be able to access employment, education, family and friends.

Specific Comments

7. NMH notes that the Plan's priorities do not appear until page 20, it would be useful from a reader's perspective to have these at the start of the document because these shape the direction of the Plan.
8. It is regrettable to see that bus service timetabling changes in 2019 have resulted in reduced services from six (6) one hourly services to four (4) one and a half hour services and there has been a loss of connectivity between the Blenheim route and the

Picton service. Frequency is particularly critical to mode shift¹. Therefore it is important that frequency of bus timetabling is reconsidered and that does not seem to be addressed in this Plan.

9. NMH notes that Tasman/Nelson have adopted performance attributes for the assessment of their Public Transport Plan which include "convenience" – *whether services enable people to travel when they want to, swiftly and reliably*. Consideration should be given to including the same approach into the Plan.²
10. NMH supports the upgrading of bus stops to ensure that they are safe and easily accessible.
11. NMH supports the upgrade of timetable holders.
12. NMH supports the implementation of real time tracking services.
13. NMH supports the investigation of fare options to provide a more attractive fare structure. In addition, NMH supports the expansion of concession tickets.
14. NMH strongly supports the extension of weekday and weekend services.
15. NMH supports the provision of bus timetables at bus stops, and the installation of more shelters.
16. Page 18 notes that "*consideration of access issues outside Blenheim will occur*" however there is no timeframe for this action. This would be beneficial.
17. NMH strongly supports bus shelters being smokefree. Public transport waiting areas often attract large numbers of people, including school children, and commuters have limited ability to avoid second hand smoke when queuing for transport. If fewer people were smoking in these public places there would be a reduction in litter and hence cleaning cost. From an environmental perspective, cigarettes are the most littered item in the world and make up almost 50 per cent of litter in urban areas. Smoke-free areas can contribute to a reduction in cigarette butt litter.³
18. NMH is pleased to see that bike racks have recently been installed on all buses, this provides patrons with opportunities to combine cycling into the bus journeys which has positive health benefits.
19. NMH supports MDC's desire to trial a range of different bus services to work out what suits the needs of the local community. It is worth noting that it does take time for patronage to build up on new routes and if frequency is low, consideration may need to be given to increases bus services rather than removing routes as this may be more attractive option for bus patrons.
20. NMH is pleased to see that the Plan identifies who may be disadvantaged in relation to lack of mode choice, affordability and disability and the Plan clearly shows how the

¹ https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/hdp.au.prod.app.nels-shape.files/4516/1352/1301/Regional_Public_Transport_Plan_2021-31.pdf

² Ibid, pg 26

³ <https://heartfoundation.org.au/images/uploads/main/Programs/SmokeFree-FactSheet1.pdf>

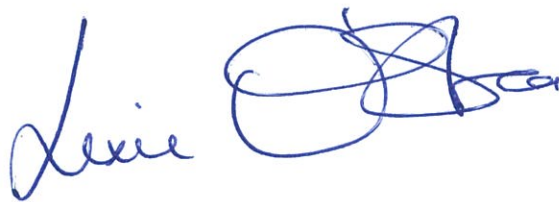
public transport services will assist. NMH would like to see this approach adopted by other Councils.

21. NMH disagrees with MDC's interpretation of the Government's Position Statement on Transport's priorities⁴. There are four strategic priorities in the GPS: Safety, Better Travel Options and Improving Freight Connections. MDC listed Economic growth and productivity as the key priority whereas "economic prosperity" is listed as part of the Transport Outcomes Framework alongside Inclusive Access, Healthy and Safe People, Environmental Sustainability and Resilience and Security. It is disappointing that GPS' priority "Better Travel Choices" is not listed in this Plan as a Priority. If the Plan aligned with the GPS priorities and transport outcomes framework, then there potentially would be more focus on expanding existing services. Currently the Plan seems heavily focused on "value for money" and limit bus expansion rather than offering "better travel choices" which result in more people using public transport and the associated benefits of this which include a decrease in car usage, lower air pollution, less congestion, increase in physical activity⁵.
22. NMH notes that the Regional Land Transport Plan shows that funding for Public Transport Services remains relatively static over the next ten years. Given that the population of the region is ageing, there will be further demand for public transport services but it does not appear that the Council is investing in this asset over time.

Conclusion

23. NMH thanks the MDC for the opportunity to comment on the Regional Public Transport Plan. NMH is pleased to see that MDC is investing into Public Transport in terms of coverage of service and reduction of fares.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lexie', followed by a large, stylized circular flourish.

Lexie O'Shea

Chief Executive

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⁴ <https://www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/Paper/GPS2021.pdf>

⁵ <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-019-0853-y>