

Summary

Draft Otago Regional Public Transport Plan

2025–2035



Have your say about the future of public transport in Otago!

Consultation period
24 March–2 May 2025

Orbus, we'll get you there

Accessible, connected, easy



1

What is the plan?

The Otago Regional Public Transport Plan (2025-2035) is a blueprint for how people move around our region.

The plan covers many public transport topics, including how we will:
Improve passenger experience, **connect** communities throughout our region, **set** our bus fares, **plan** our bus routes and **fund** public transport.

Why should you care?

This plan will guide how Otago Regional Council will invest time and money into public transport for the **next ten years (2025-2035)**.

These investments will affect how people in your community get to work, school or other destinations. The choices we make impact you.

We want to make sure rates are spent efficiently so our communities have affordable and convenient public transport options.

This is especially important as our population grows and ages. If you use public transport, this plan also explores how we best charge for our services.

We need your feedback on some big decisions

- Do the plan's focus areas **capture the right priorities**?
- Should we **support non-profit community transport services** in our smaller communities?
- Should we **increase our bus fares**?
- Should passengers travelling **longer distances pay higher bus fares**?
- Should we **change our child concessions**?

These are just a few topics we're asking for feedback on, but you can **provide feedback on any part of the plan!**

Read the draft plan



Read the draft plan at **orc.govt.nz/rptp** (or scan the QR code) or view at your local ORC office or library.

Timeline for your feedback



2

Why does public transport in Otago matter?

It improves our quality of life

Public transport helps us commute to work or school, visit friends or go shopping in a flexible and affordable way.

It is good for the economy, the environment, and our communities

As more people use public transport, our towns will have less traffic and more productivity. They will also produce fewer carbon emissions and harmful pollutants, improving our air quality and contributing to healthier communities.

It can connect communities throughout Otago

Public transport can provide our smaller communities with better access to nearby towns and cities with key services, such as healthcare.

It can support our region's growth

As our population grows, it is crucial that we have an efficient transport system that serves our urban areas and minimises our environmental impact.

What if I don't use public transport?

Many people do not have access to public transport where they live. Other people live near public transport but it doesn't suit their needs. Others still prefer another way of getting around, like walking, cycling or driving.

While you may not use public transport, it still benefits you.

Where there is good public transport, fewer people need to drive. This means less congestion on the roads, enabling people who drive cars to travel faster and safer.

It also means we can all breathe cleaner air, free of harmful pollutants. This is especially true as we invest in more electric buses.

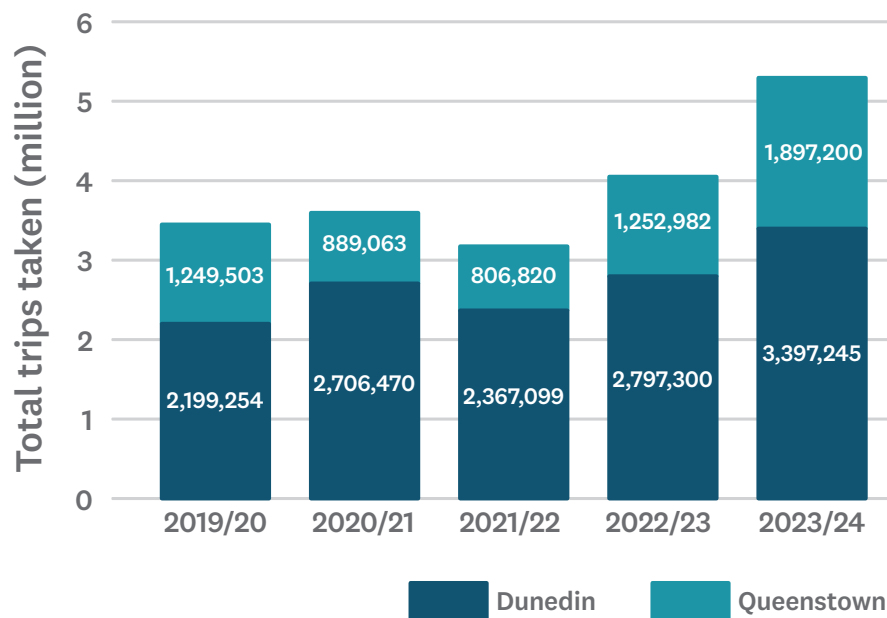


3

We are doing well, but we face some challenges

Otago's public transport network is performing well. Our patronage numbers have rebounded since the Covid-19 pandemic, and more people than ever are taking public transport.

The total number of trips taken on our bus networks, 2019/20 to 2023/24



Patronage in Otago has increased by 54% from 2019/20 to 2023/24 (3.4 million to 5.3 million)!

We want to keep this momentum going by **bringing more services to more people**, but we are facing some tough choices.

We have some tough decisions to make

We value access, transport options and the economic, health and environmental benefits that a convenient, reliable and efficient public transport system delivers for our communities.

However, recent changes in central government policy mean we are now required to recover a greater share of public transport operating costs from private sources.

In short, this means we need to **increase our revenue** from private sources (passenger fares and advertising) or **decrease our spending** on service delivery.

How will we respond?

We are committed to keeping our services convenient and affordable for everyone and will continue building on our past successes.

However, the current operating environment limits what we can do — we can't be as ambitious as we'd like to be.

We will continue to explore public transport options for our smaller communities, including Ōamaru, Balclutha, Wānaka, Cromwell, Clyde and Alexandra.

We are also considering how much we charge (fares) for riding public transport.

4

Where are we now?

We have made significant progress improving public transport in Otago over the last 10 years.

Total Mobility

Serving 5 communities

We have:

- Moved from paper vouchers to cards (2017)
- Increased subsidy from 50% to 75% (2022)



Queenstown

5 bus routes and 1 ferry

We have:

- Transitioned from a commercial bus service to a publicly subsidised service (2017)
- Rolled out a \$2 flat fare (2017)
- Introduced network service capacity and introduced ferries (2020)
- Increased school services (2023)

Dunedin

23 bus routes

We have:

- Redesigned the network to have more direct routes with higher frequencies (2015)
- Opened the bus hub (2019)
- Introduced weekend services to Palmerston, Waitati and Waikouaiti (2022)
- Begun rolling out zero-emission electric buses (2023)
- Added express and peak services to Mosgiel (2023)
- Made significant bus stop upgrades (2024)
- Introduced the flat \$2 fare and free child fares (5-12 yrs) (2020)

Other key improvements throughout Otago

- Introducing the Bee Card ticketing system (2020)
- Introducing real-time bus tracking and trip planning via the Transit app (2021)
- Paying our bus drivers above Living Wage (2023)
- Providing real-time information at our bus stops (2024)

5

We have big plans for the future

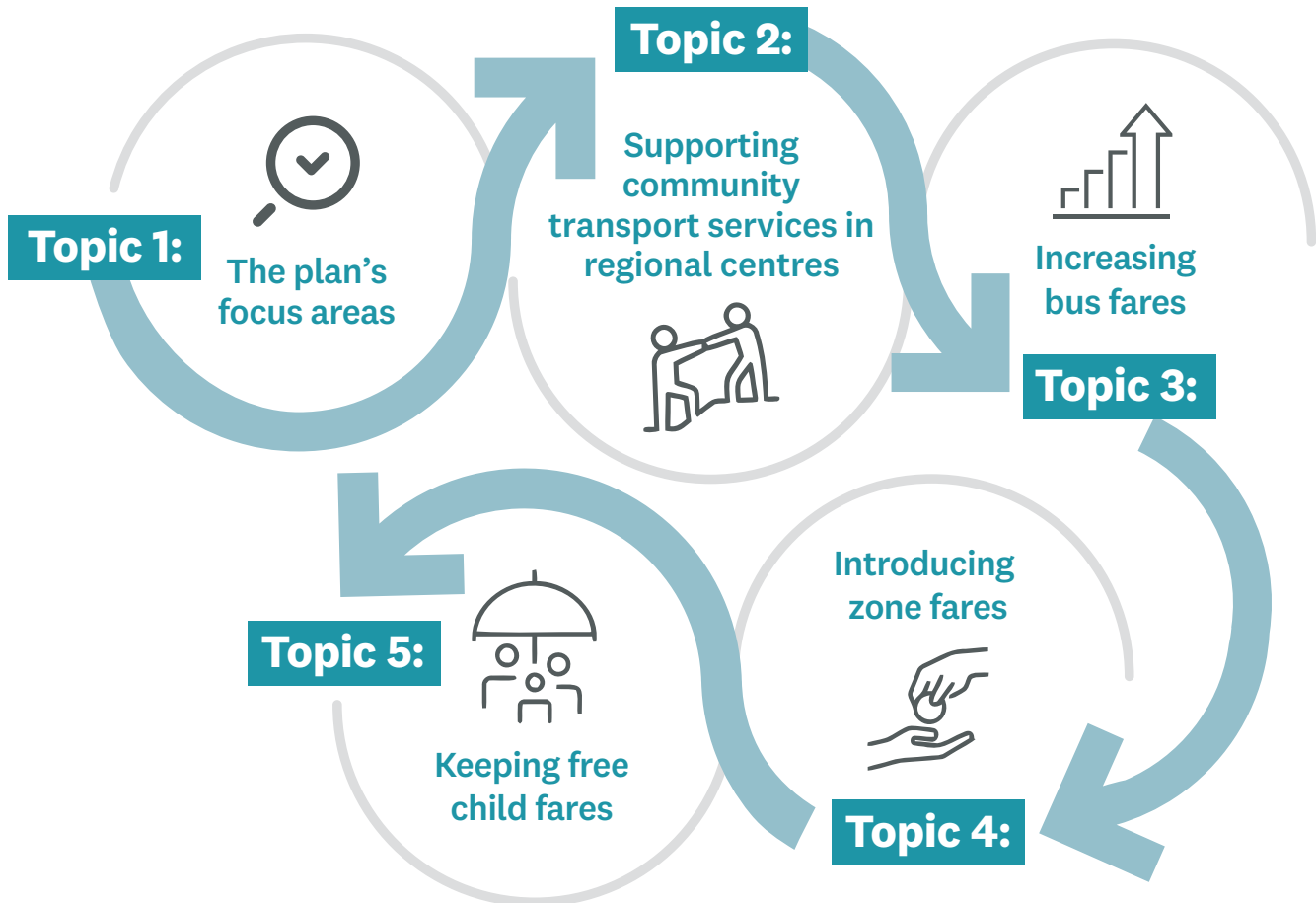
Here's what we want to do in the next few years:

	Regional	Queenstown	Dunedin
Next three years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community transport services to connect people in remote areas • Offer Total Mobility services in Alexandra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve frequencies toward 30 minutes or better all day on all routes • Update Stanley Street and Frankton bus hub infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete electrification of the bus fleet
3–10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Dunedin–Ōamaru & Dunedin–Balclutha services • Improve connections between Queenstown, Cromwell and Alexandra 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve frequencies to 15 minutes at peak, or better, on all routes • Introduce electric buses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve frequencies to Shiel Hill, Ōpoho, Calton Hill, Pine Hill and Mosgiel toward 15 minutes all day
10–30 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop further viable public transport connections between our regional communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve frequencies to 15 minutes all day, on all routes • Increase hours of service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve other strong routes to 15 minutes frequencies all day

6

Give us your feedback

This is where you come in. Over the next few pages, we've highlighted **five topics that we'd like your feedback on:**



Keep in mind . . .

- Our vision is that Otago has a public transport system that contributes to the accessibility and connectivity of our community, including transport-disadvantaged people, reduces congestion and supports community wellbeing aspirations.
- We believe investing in public transport is essential for our communities to thrive.
- However, the decisions we make around public transport are not easy. We need to deliver a reliable public transport system that serves our communities while making the most of our limited resources.

This is why we want to hear from you — **to make sure your perspectives are at the forefront of the decisions we make.**

We'd like to hear your thoughts on these topics, as well as any other part of the plan.

Why should you care?

- Our focus areas and objectives guide our policies and the way we design, deliver and improve our public transport system. They will direct where we put our money and effort over the next 10 years.
- Do you agree that these focus areas capture Otago's public transport priorities?

More details about our focus areas can be found in Section 1.6 of the plan.



Topic 1:

Are we focusing on the right things in the plan?

We have structured the plan around **five focus areas** that reflect how we want to deliver public transport services in Otago. These focus areas each have an associated objective and several key priorities.

Focus area	Objective	Key priorities
1. Passenger experience	Provide useful public transport services that respect the safety and wellbeing of passengers, particularly for transport-disadvantaged people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver a high-quality customer experience by prioritising passenger access, safety and comfort• Easy access to timetable, ticketing, and real-time information• Promotion and education on how to use our services to reduce barriers to access
2. Build trust	Proactively engage with communities and organisations, including iwi, to foster trust and ensure public transport projects align with community priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong collaborative relationships with key partners in the planning and delivery of public transport• Utilise an equity-focused approach to supporting the needs of transport-disadvantaged people
3. Environmental sustainability	Invest in a public transport system that promotes positive outcomes regarding greenhouse gas emissions, pollutants and land use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proactively support good land use policy through integration with public transport design• Support electrification of the public transport fleet
4. A connected and integrated network	Deliver a reliable and convenient public transport system that improves personal freedom and access to opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design services according to best-practice design principles• Enhance urban networks through new services and improvements to frequency and service hours• Enhance regional connectivity through trial services and community transport
5. Value for money	Provide public transport services in a manner that represents good value for money.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set fares so they are simple, fair and affordable to users, but generate sufficient revenue to maintain financial sustainability of our services• Improve financial performance by enhancing third-party revenue sources and implementing efficiencies in service delivery• Procure service contracts in a way that supports fair pricing, a competitive market, and sustainable delivery of services

Have your say

What do you think about the draft RPTP? Provide your feedback in the submission form at the end of this document or at orc.govt.nz/rptp



Topic 2:

Should we support community transport services in smaller towns and rural areas?

Providing public transport to Otago's smaller towns and rural areas is challenging.

Small populations and large distances between destinations make it impractical to operate scheduled services in an affordable way.

As a result, many people in these areas are forced to drive to meet their daily needs.

But many people cannot drive due to age, income or another reason, making it difficult for them to get around, access healthcare and participate in activities they value.

Increasing regional connectivity is one of our key priorities. We would like to explore how we can better serve our regional centres by improving basic levels of connectivity within and between these areas.

Why should you care?

A willing community is essential for community transport programmes to succeed. We would like to provide resources and financial support to help our communities set up and administer community transport, but community volunteers are the backbone of community transport.

The most important thing to consider is the value of a potential community transport service to your community.

Further, community transport programmes may pave the way to scheduled public transport services in the future. **More details about community transport can be found in Section 2.8 of the plan.**

Why do we think this is a good idea?

Community transport is an equitable transport solution that allows people to maintain their independence by enabling them to travel without relying on family and friends.

It also helps bring people to social events, reducing social isolation and creating more connected communities in the process.

It is also a cost-effective transport option because it is run by volunteers and typically uses inexpensive vehicles, like cars or vans.

Our proposal: we are considering the establishment of a subsidised community transport programme providing support for community transport services in Otago's smaller towns and rural areas.

Community transport typically involves a Community Vehicle Trust, which is a non-profit charitable trust that relies on local volunteers to drive people where they want to go.

These trusts are governed by a local board of trustees and funded by donors. Regional councils in Canterbury and Waikato currently support Community Vehicle Trusts. There are several Community Vehicle Trusts in Otago already, but they do not receive financial assistance from ORC.

We're under pressure to achieve private share targets

Central government has made policy changes requiring councils across the country to increase the proportion of public transport operating costs that are funded by private sources, such as passenger fares and advertising revenue. This is known as private share.

Otago Regional Council must now work towards achieving private share targets by **increasing our revenue** from private sources, **decreasing our spending** on service delivery, or a combination of these.

Some ways we can do this are to increase the number of people taking public transport, raising passenger fares,

changing our concessions, cutting existing bus service levels or increasing advertising on buses.

We are committed to keeping our services convenient and affordable for everyone. This means meeting these private share targets will require careful management and some tough choices.

Topics 3, 4 and 5 on the following pages outline some changes we are considering for our Dunedin and Queenstown bus networks to achieve our private share targets. **For more information about 'private share' targets, see Appendix I of the plan.**



Topic 3:

Should we increase our passenger fares?

We want fares to be low enough for public transport to be affordable and accessible for everyone.

We also need to set fares at a price that enables us to generate enough revenue to maintain and upgrade our services.

More revenue typically means our bus services are more frequent, cover a wider area and provide our passengers with a better experience.

The \$2 fares in Dunedin and Queenstown have encouraged more people to use public transport more often.

However, as the government expects us to cover a greater proportion of operating costs, we need to consider raising passenger fares.

Things to consider — raising fares will:

- likely mean that some people will choose to drive, walk or cycle rather than take public transport
- likely mean that some people will not be able to get out because they cannot afford the bus and have no other way of getting around
- increase revenue in the short term, but the potential loss of patronage may reduce future revenue.

Our proposal: we are considering increasing the base fare for adult Bee Card passengers from \$2 to \$2.50. This would effectively increase bus fares for all passengers using Bee Cards by 25%.

Have your say

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Topic 4:

Should we charge more for longer trips?

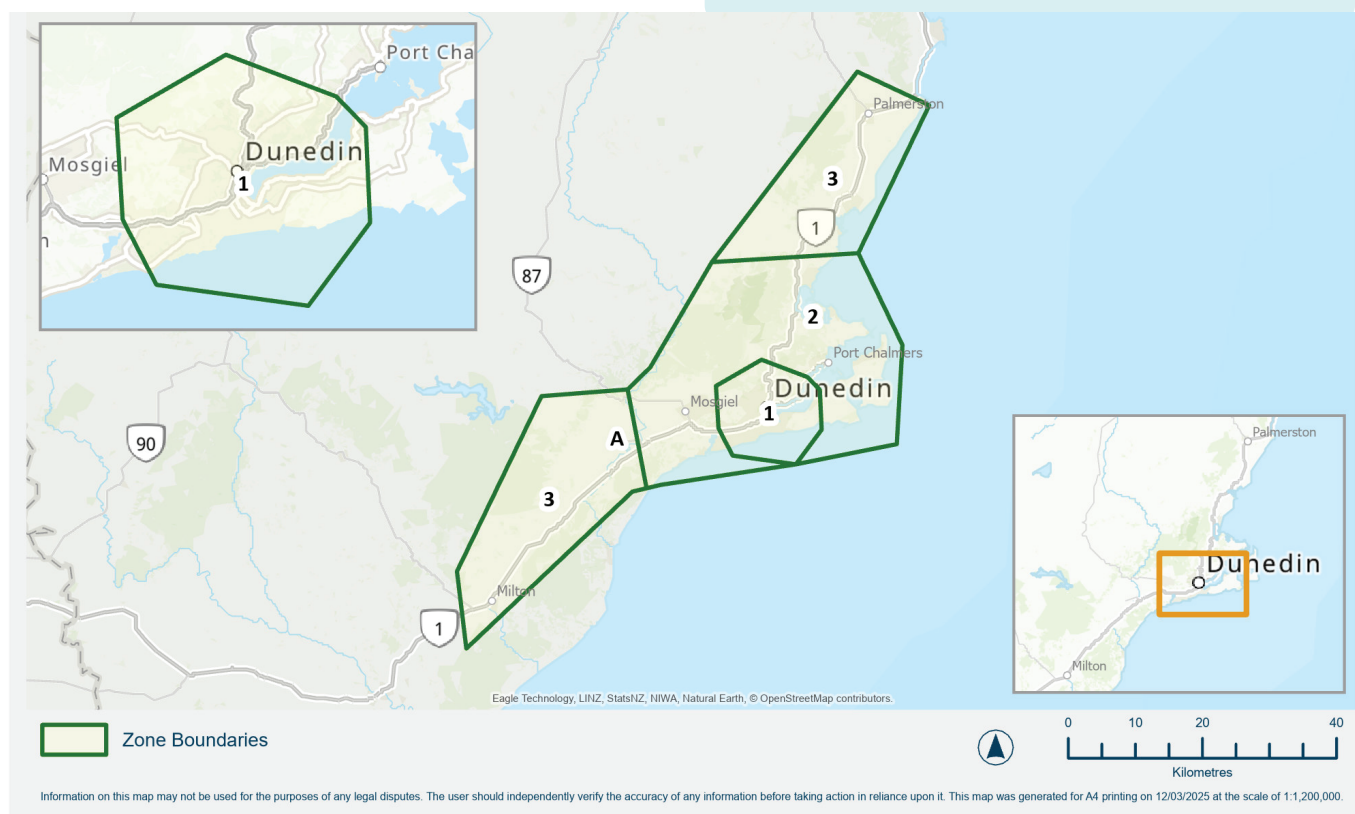
Bus passengers currently pay a flat fare for all trips, regardless of how far they travel.

But not all trips cost the same amount of money to operate. For example, the bus travelling 50 kilometres from Palmerston to Dunedin costs more to operate than a bus travelling a short distance within Dunedin.

We used to have a zone fare system before introducing the flat \$2 fare. Zone fares are currently used in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington. **Should we change our fare structure to a zone fare system so different zones can have different fares?**

Our proposal: we are considering introducing a zone fare system to our bus networks in Dunedin and Queenstown. Under this system, passengers travelling further distances across multiple zones will pay a higher fare than those travelling short distances within one zone.

Proposed zone boundaries — Dunedin



Why should you care?

A zone fare system will allow us to charge more for longer trips. This helps distribute the cost of services more equitably across passengers.

Bee Card users will still enjoy a seamless experience and will automatically be charged the correct fare when tagging off.

The maps below show our proposed zones. These zones are simpler and easier to understand than the zones used in Dunedin before 2020. They have also been designed to include potential future services.

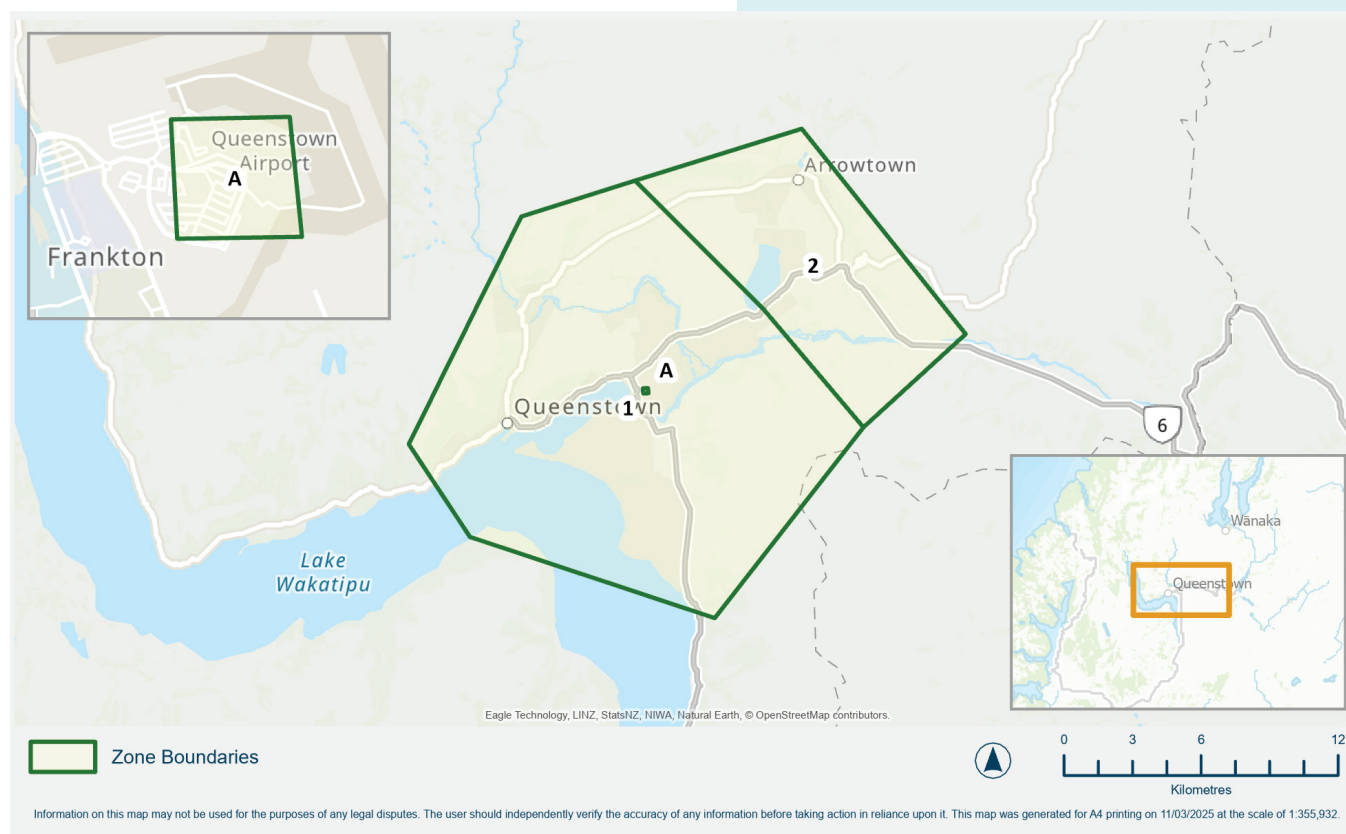


Proposed zone boundaries — Queenstown

Zone 1: Queenstown town centre, Sunshine Bay, Arthurs Point, Kelvin Heights, Jack's Point, Frankton, Lake Hayes Estate

Zone 2: Arrowtown, Arrow Junction, Gibbston

Airport Zone: Queenstown Airport



Have your say

What do you think about the draft RPTP? Provide your feedback in the submission form at the end of this document or at orcnz.govt.nz/rptp



Topic 5:

Should we keep our free fares for children (5-12 years)?

We use concessions to provide discounted fares for children. Currently Council subsidises 100% of the child fare (5-12 years).

Youth passengers (13-18 years) also receive discounted fares in Dunedin and Queenstown, but currently these are at different rates.

Our proposal: retain free fares (100% discount) for children (5-12 years). Standardise our concession discount for youth (13-18 years) to 40% across both the Dunedin and Queenstown networks. Community Connect and SuperGold concessions will not be changed.

Why should you care?

Children have few travel options. Retaining free fares for children and discounted fares for youth helps keep public transport affordable for families. It may also encourage our younger people to ride the bus more in the future.

Having the same youth concession in both Dunedin and Queenstown keeps it fair and easy to understand.

The table below shows the current and proposed child and youth concessions and fares.

Please note that these figures are subject to change based on this consultation and Council decisions.

Retaining free fares for children will keep public transport affordable for families, but it means we might have to use other options to increase our revenue and meet our private share targets.

	Current Adult Bee Card \$2	Proposed Adult Bee Card \$2.50
Infant (under 5 years)	Free	Free
Child (5-12 years)	Free (100% discount)	Free (100% discount)
Youth (13-18 years)	Dunedin: \$1.20 (40% discount) Queenstown: \$1.50 (25% discount)	Dunedin: \$1.50 (40% discount) Queenstown: \$1.50 (40% discount)



We're coming to a community near you

Do you have questions or feedback you'd like to speak to us about?

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Come talk to us about the future of public transport in Otago at one of our public consultation drop-in sessions. We will be easy to find and would love to hear your thoughts!

Dunedin	Dunedin City Centre The Octagon, Dunedin	Thursday, 17 April 12–2pm
	South Dunedin Lorne St and King Edward St intersection	Thursday, 3 April 12.30–2.30pm
	Mosgiel Library 7 Hartstonge Avenue, Mosgiel	Wednesday, 9 April 1–3pm
Queenstown Lakes	Queenstown Library 10 Gorge Road, Queenstown	Thursday, 3 April 12–2pm
	Queenstown Events Centre Joe O'Connell Drive, Frankton	Thursday, 3 April 4–6pm
	Wanaka Wastebusters Ballantyne Road, Wānaka	Friday, 4 April 10.30am–12.30pm
Central Otago	Alexandra Public Library 43 Tarbert Street, Alexandra	Wednesday, 2 April 12–1pm
	Cromwell Primary School 61 Molyneux Avenue, Cromwell	Wednesday, 2 April 2.30–3.30pm
Clutha	Balclutha Public lot at 50 Clyde St, Balclutha	Tuesday, 25 March 2–4pm
Waitaki	Ōamaru Library 62 Thames Street, Ōamaru	Thursday, 10 April 11.30am–1.30pm
	Ōamaru Library 62 Thames Street, Ōamaru	Thursday, 10 April 2–3pm

Get your feedback in by 2 May 2025

How you can make an RPTP submission

We encourage you to make a submission on any part of this plan. Please use one of the following ways to share your thoughts.

Online

Use the online form at **orc.govt.nz/rptp**

By email

Email your submission to **transport.submissions@orc.govt.nz** with RPTP submission in the subject line. Please include your name and address.

By post

Post your hard copy submission to the address below:

**RPTP Consultation
Otago Regional Council
Private Bag 1954
Dunedin 9054.**

In person

Visit one of our service centres to drop off your submission:

Dunedin
Level 2, Philip Laing House,
144 Rattray Street, Dunedin

Queenstown
Level 1, Terrace Junction,
1092 Frankton Road, Queenstown

Need help?

Please email us at **transport.submissions@orc.govt.nz** or call us at **0800 474 082** if you need help with your submission.

We are not able to accept your submission without a name and address. However, you can indicate in your submission if you do not wish your name and address to be made public.

“Have your voice heard, make a submission.”