

1. Introduction

Regular passenger services last ran between Hamilton and Tauranga in 2001. The demise of the “Kaimai Express” came about because of insufficient demand to meet service operating costs, at a time when rail was not strongly supported by central government policy. Since then, the East Coast Main Trunk Line (ECMTL) has become the country’s busiest for freight usage, with Port of Tauranga generating the demand.

Waikato Regional Council has delivered the first phase Te Huia service (funded jointly with Waka Kotahi) and has plans to significantly develop the future rail network between Hamilton and Auckland. The Hamilton to Auckland Intercity Connectivity Indicative Business Case (IBC), led by Ministry of Transport, is looking at faster rail connections by way of infrastructure upgrades, and ultimate deployment of new rolling stock, between Hamilton and Auckland. Concurrently the Auckland Rail Programme Business Case is being jointly developed between Auckland Transport and KiwiRail. This study incorporates a look into how future regional passenger rail services from Hamilton, and the likes of Tauranga, may access the current heavily congested Auckland Rail network to central Auckland by identifying key investment interventions required. These initiatives are both important in understanding the required network improvements to get services from Tauranga to access the Auckland network. It is essential that BoPRC fully participates in these discussions. With both Hamilton and Tauranga growing rapidly as part of the Upper North Island “Golden Triangle”, and emissions reductions top of the government agenda, the time seems right to seriously investigate re-introduction of passenger services between Hamilton and Tauranga.

This submission to the Bay of Plenty Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) consultation draft has been prepared by a group of community-focussed professionals who are interested in investigating a **co-operative model** for planning, funding and operating a passenger rail service between Tauranga and Hamilton (with onward connections into Auckland via the Te Huia service).

The RPTP represents an opportunity for Bay of Plenty Regional Council (BoPRC) to provide in-principle support for this initiative and ensure that it is aligned with RPTP objectives. We should emphasise that this support does not mean we expect a passenger rail service to be delivered without going through a robust business case process. This process will be required to understand how passenger rail could be integrated with future rail freight services, without negatively impacting on them.

2. Comment on Passenger Rail Policy in the RPTP

The draft Bay of Plenty Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) includes the following policy:

“Work collaboratively with central government and regional partners to continue exploring the potential for viable inter-regional passenger rail and/or commuter services in the longer term.”

We believe that passenger rail strongly supports the following RPTP objectives:

Table 1: Potential Contribution of Passenger Rail to RPTP Objectives

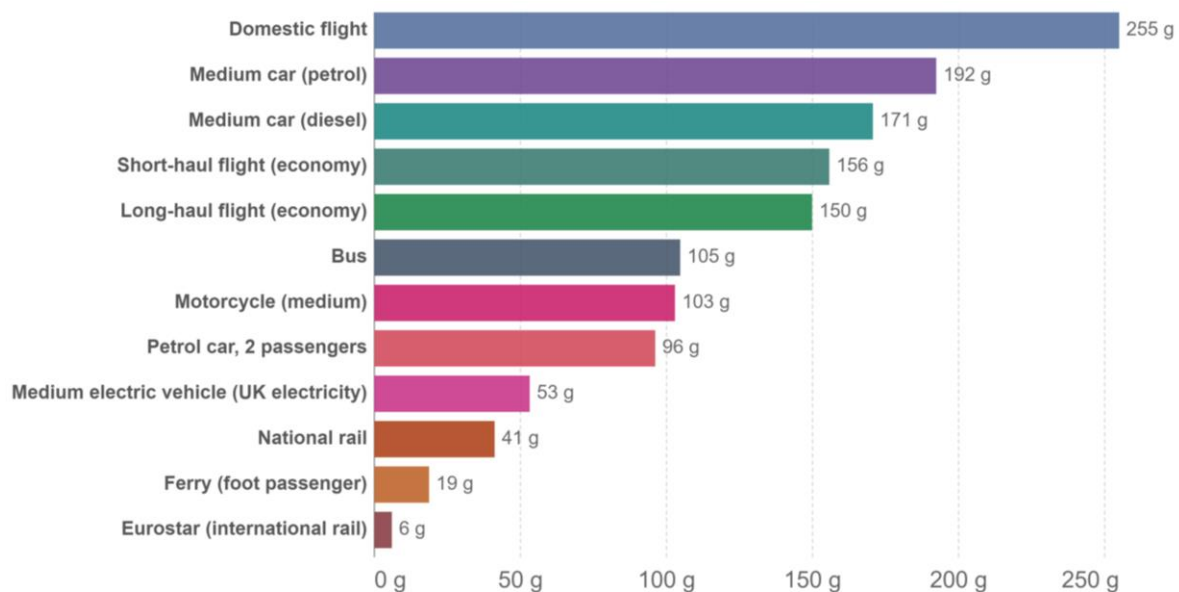
RPTP Objective(s)	Summary of Contribution
Public transport successfully contributes to the region’s mode shift and greenhouse gas reduction goals.	Passenger rail services, especially if they are powered by electric traction, emit significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions compared with

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RPTP Objective(s)	Summary of Contribution
Reduce public transport emissions by decarbonising the region's fleet.	either private car or aeroplane (see Figure 1 below).
Easy to use public transport that is accessible to existing and potential customers.	Passenger rail services can provide greater levels of access between the Bay of Plenty and regions which make up the "Golden Triangle" – namely Waikato and Auckland.
Public transport services and infrastructure combine to deliver a safe, reliable, punctual and high-quality customer experience while providing value for money.	As a mode of transport, rail is statistically much safer than road for passenger journeys in particular. As it runs on dedicated infrastructure, passenger rail avoids traffic congestion on the road, especially on the approaches to major urban areas. The Te Huia (Hamilton-Auckland) rail service demonstrates that it is possible to provide a very high level of customer service and value for money through affordable fares.
Integrated public transport and land use planning supports well-functioning urban environments that enable all people and communities to provide for their social, economic, and cultural wellbeing, and for their health and safety, now and into the future.	Because of its ability to move large numbers of people, and creation of concentrations of passengers at certain nodes (i.e. railway stations), passenger rail has the ability to support compact, intensive, walkable and socially inclusive neighbourhoods.
An excellent customer experience that grows passenger numbers.	Both the Auckland and Wellington metro rail systems have demonstrated that it is possible to provide a convenient and attractive service that people will use in preference to other modes.

Figure 1: Carbon Footprint of Travel per Kilometre (2018)



Source: UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2019.

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Note: Data is based on official conversion factors used in UK reporting. These factors may vary slightly depending on the country, and assumed occupancy of public transport such as buses and trains.

Key point of submission:

Whilst we fully support the draft RPTP policy we would like to see clear actions and resources associated with its implementation. It is particularly important to use population, development and travel demand forecasts to understand what the phrase “long term” actually means, and then work back to the present day to map out a clear pathway of feasibility business case, design and implementation activities.

We would like to see BoPRC take a much more pro-active role in engaging with the rail sector, in particular to support the likes of Waikato Regional and Greater Wellington Regional Councils who are at the forefront of promoting inter-regional passenger rail.

3. Introducing The Rail Co-operative Concept to the RPTP

The two traditional models of rail service delivery are based on either direct local / central government operation or a private sector franchising / management contract (with government generally specifying the service). In either case, local communities and passengers are dependent on government to meet their rail travel needs and experience (often through a “consultative committee”). A possible “third way” is the specification and operation of rail services based on a **co-operative model**.

There are seven internationally agreed principles that define how any kind of co-operative should operate:

1. Owned and controlled, and exists for the benefit of, its members - who may be customers, workers, suppliers or the wider community.
2. Democratic – every member has an equal say in how the co-operative is run and how profits are used.
3. Every member contributes financially in some way – from buying products, working for the co-operative, investment in it or deciding how to spend profits.
4. An independent business, owned and controlled by its members.
5. Offers education and training to everyone involved, so they can develop the co-operative and promote the benefits of co-operation.
6. Co-operates, works with and supports other co-operatives.
7. Supports the communities it works with.

According to the New Zealand co-operative web site¹, the country is one of the most co-operative economies in the world with the top 30 co-operatives alone contributing 13% of GDP by revenue and employing more than 41,000 New Zealanders.

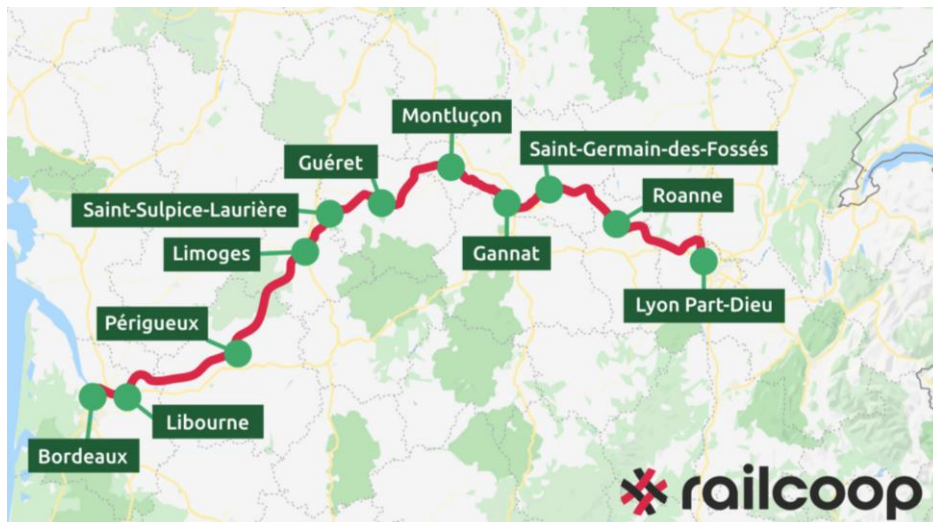
Co-operatives in the rail sector exist in several countries, with the two most well-known examples being:

- Railcoop² – are re-opening the mothballed Bordeaux – Lyon line to both freight and passengers (with freight services already running).

Figure 2: Railcoop Proposed Passenger Route

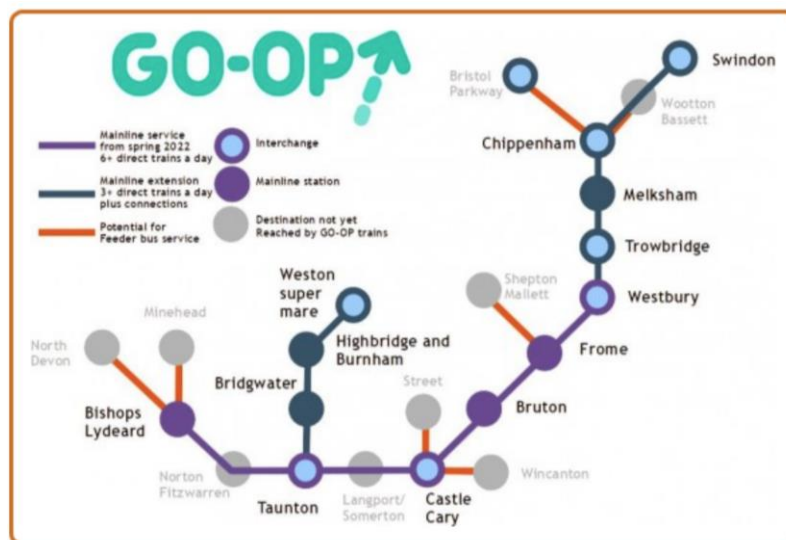
¹ [Co-operatives in New Zealand : Cooperative Business New Zealand \(nz.coop\)](https://www.nz.coop/)

² [Home | RAILCOOP](https://www.railcoop.com/)



- Go-op Train³ – who are planning services between Bishops Lydeard and Swindon in the UK.

Figure 3: Go-op Proposed Passenger Route



Several local community groups and individuals are interested in the feasibility of establishing a co-operative to investigate, plan and ultimately operate a passenger rail service connecting Tauranga, Omokoroa, Waharoa / Matamata, Morrinsville and Hamilton using the ECMTL. These aspirations are captured in the report *Making Rail Work* (produced by Tarakin Global and funded by Bay Trust) – copy attached to this submission. Given the likely need for a future upgrade of the ECMTL to support higher levels of freight traffic from the Port of Tauranga, there is an opportunity to make a strong case for passenger rail at the same time.

Local government in the Bay of Plenty is grappling with significant transport and development challenges, and so the aim of the co-operative would be to help move the passenger rail agenda forward by working closely with the respective Regional Councils, Tauranga Transport System Plan, Future Proof, Ministry of Transport, Waka Kotahi and KiwiRail. The co-operative model does not preclude government or private

³ [GO-OP! Cooperative |](#)

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sector involvement, as these organisations can (and arguably should) choose to be members and hence be part of the governance process.

Key point of submission:

We request that the RPTP formally acknowledges community aspirations to establish a co-operative for passenger rail services between Tauranga and Hamilton (with onward connections to Auckland). We further request that a new policy in the RPTP outlines:

- In-principle BoPRC support for investigation and potential establishment of a rail co-operative;
- Commitment from BoPRC to participate in the cooperative if feasibility and viability is established;
- Include funding for business case work in the next Regional Land Transport Plan (RLTP); and
- Agreement to provide in-kind staff resource from the BoPRC transport planning team.

4. Greater Leadership on Development of Passenger Rail

The Waikato draft RPTP contains a clear well-explained and deliverable set of aspirations for passenger rail. Included in these aspirations are proposals for links to Tauranga, specifically:

- Advocate and support rail track improvements between Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga; and
- Support Government and advocate for the prioritisation of Government-led fast and frequent rail initiatives connecting New Zealand's fastest growing cities of Auckland, Hamilton and Tauranga.

The Waikato draft RPTP therefore contains greater detail on links to Tauranga than the Bay of Plenty RPTP. The concern in some quarters is that BoPRC has a perceived conflict of interest, given its part ownership of the Port of Tauranga and consequent emphasis on prioritising rail freight. We believe there should not necessarily be any such conflict if BoPRC commits to exploring improving infrastructure for passenger rail as part of plans to increase capacity for freight at the same time.

The attached presentation and article by rail expert Michael van Drogenbroek provides clear evidence that there are plenty of opportunities for regions to pursue inter-regional passenger rail, if there is strong political and senior officer leadership coupled with a willingness to work across regional borders. Our concern is that the Bay of Plenty risks being left behind and relegated to the status of a minor economic player in the New Zealand knowledge economy unless it becomes fully committed to playing its part in the revival of inter-regional rail.

We would also like to see much stronger links between transport and spatial planning, with intensive development areas around potential passenger rail stations (for example in the centre of Tauranga) being given much greater emphasis in the future Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

Key point of submission:

The final RPTP and delivery programme should provide greater evidence of leadership in promoting future passenger rail and both the political and senior officer (Chief Executive and General Manager) level. At present this leadership is behind that being demonstrated in the Waikato region.

This leadership should include undertaking to work with Waikato Regional Council to jointly promote passenger rail improvements, and also producing its own passenger rail strategy. Further, discussions and work should also be undertaken with KiwiRail, Waka Kotahi and MOT to contribute to the development of a national inter regional rail passenger strategy and policy. All of these organisations are working to various degrees on developing this strategy and policy.

The next RLTP should clearly articulate the passenger rail strategy and outline funding proposals for business case work to take forward inter-regional passenger rail.

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The future RSS should thoroughly investigate policies, plans and delivery strategies which cluster development around passenger rail stations.