



Who we are

We are the Aotearoa Collective for Public Transport Equity, also known as the Free Fares Campaign. We are a coalition of over 100 unions, churches, climate action groups, disability rights advocates, community organisations, and local councils—all united by the vision of a more affordable, accessible public transport system. We call on the Government to fully fund free public transport for Community Services Card holders, tertiary students, under-25s, and Total Mobility Card holders and their support people. We also call on the Government to fully fund free Total Mobility services for users and their support people.

To learn more about our campaign, visit our website (freefares.nz) and feel free to contact us by email (freefaresnz@gmail.com).

Our views on the Total Mobility (TM) Review Proposals

We oppose reductions to TM fare subsidies and fare caps

The Government's proposed reductions to TM fare subsidies and fare caps will impose significantly higher transport costs for users. The trip subsidy reduction from 75% to 65% would mean an approximately 40% relative increase in fares for TM users per trip. Additionally, the proposed 10% reduction in the fare cap would make it easier to reach the subsidy cut-off, further raising costs for TM users. To illustrate, **Table 1** shows the large potential cost increases to TM users in Auckland and Wellington from these proposals, particularly for long-distance travellers approaching the fare subsidy caps. We further note that the calculated figures in **Table 1** are for singular trips; cost increases would be compounded for those who frequently use TM services.

The transport cost increases will be deeply inequitable, burdening some of the most vulnerable New Zealanders least able to afford them. Disabled people already face large barriers to accessing transport, including limited availability of wheelchair-accessible taxi services, insufficient public transport coverage, difficulty driving, and the high cost of transport.¹ Disabled people tend to face greater transport challenges than non-disabled people, with 13% of disabled people reporting frequent difficulty getting to places due to transport problems (compared to 6% of non-disabled people); disabled people are also more likely to not have access to a motor vehicle and report struggles with using public transport.² By virtue of their impairment, disabled people are more likely to report poor wellbeing, income inadequacy, and feeling under-supported than non-disabled people (**Table 2**).² Unaffordable transport plays a key part in these worse life outcomes, reducing disabled people's access to daily life needs, health services, recreation, and time with friends and family—in order to save money.¹ Imposing higher costs on disabled people's transport,

which these proposed TM fare changes would do, risks further depriving thousands of New Zealanders of an opportunity to live the normal lives that they deserve and aspire to have.

We consider these proposed cost increases to TM users to be a missed opportunity to empower disabled people to live the lives that they wish. Society as a whole benefits from disabled people's participation—not just socially, but also economically. In the June 2025 quarter, 14% of disabled people in the labour force (7,900 adults) were unemployed, i.e. actively sought work but could not find it, compared to merely 5% of non-disabled people.³ Many disabled people want to work, with 72% of disabled adults (144,000 adults) who did not have a paid job wanting one in 2023.² The barriers to disabled people's employment include transport, with 49% of unemployed disabled people who sought work saying that suitable transport to and from work might help them find a job.² The economic benefits of improving disabled people's access to employment would be substantial, with one estimate indicating that gross domestic product (GDP) could have been \$578 million greater in 2025 had unemployment been at parity between disabled and non-disabled New Zealanders.⁴ The upcoming TM fare increases risk making economic opportunities even more out of reach for disabled people, and the opportunity cost of this will burden not only disabled people, but wider society too.

We disagree with the Government's rationale of reducing the TM fare subsidies and caps in order to reduce cost pressures on the scheme. While indeed growing costlier over time due to greater uptake,⁵ the Total Mobility scheme is still fairly inexpensive—costing the Crown merely \$24.3 million in the 2024/25 financial year.⁶ This is a very small portion of annual transport spending: about 1.5% of the operating expenditure on state highways (\$1.6 billion in 2024/25), 2.6% of the operating expenditure on local roads (\$933 million), and 3.1% of the operating expenditure on public transport (\$781 million).⁶ The Government's estimated shortfall of \$236 million between 2025 and 2030 for Total Mobility would indeed represent an increase to current annual Crown funding,⁵ but would nonetheless be small compared to other transport spending. We believe that reducing the fare subsidies and fare caps for Total Mobility would be largely ineffective at reducing overall transport spending, if this is the Government's aim.

We consider the increasing cost of Total Mobility to instead reflect greater mobility for disabled people—something to celebrate. The cost increases that are forecast for Total Mobility are being driven by increases in the number of users and number of trips taken, with the number of registered users rising to 120,000 and the number of trips rising to 3 million in 2024/25.⁵ The introduction of the current 75% fare subsidy regime for TM in 2022 was welcomed by many in the disabled community,⁷ with a significant number of TM users calling the previous 50% subsidy level insufficient to grant them full mobility.¹ Raising TM fares will likely not only fail at generating appreciable savings for the Government, but it also risks making many disabled people again unable to fully participate in society.

The proposed reductions to the fare subsidy and fare caps for Total Mobility will negatively impact the lives and societal inclusion of thousands of vulnerable New Zealanders. Not only would this be deeply unfair by burdening those who are least able to pay, but it would also be inefficient: society would continue to miss out on the economic benefits of increasing disabled people's participation. These negative outcomes would occur while bringing minimal financial gain to the Government. We at Free Fares heavily oppose this policy direction.

Table 1. Example costs to TM users before and after fare subsidy and cap reductions.⁸

Region	Travel	Full Fare	Fare Cap		Fare Subsidy ^[a]		Cost for User	
			Before changes	After changes	Before changes	After changes	Before Changes	After changes
Auckland ^[b]	1 km	\$9.50	\$80.00	\$72.00 (-10%)	\$7.13	\$6.18	\$2.38	\$3.33 (+40%)
	5 km	\$27.50			\$20.63	\$17.88	\$6.88	\$9.63 (+40%)
	10 km	\$50.00			\$37.50	\$32.50	\$12.50	\$17.50 (+40%)
	15 km	\$72.50			\$54.38	\$46.80	\$18.13	\$25.70 (+42%)
	20 km	\$95.00			\$60.00	\$46.80	\$35.00	\$48.20 (+38%)
Wellington ^[c]	1 km	\$10.35	\$80.00	\$72.00 (-10%)	\$6.26	\$5.43	\$4.09	\$4.92 (+20%)
	5 km	\$25.75			\$17.81	\$15.44	\$7.94	\$10.31 (+20%)
	10 km	\$45.00			\$32.25	\$27.95	\$12.75	\$17.05 (+34%)
	15 km	\$64.25			\$46.69	\$40.46	\$17.56	\$23.79 (+35%)
	20 km	\$83.50			\$60.00	\$46.80	\$23.50	\$36.70 (+56%)

^[a] Calculation method: the full fare amount (exc. service fees) is subsidised (75% before changes, 65% after changes) up to the fare cap, and thereafter fully borne by the user.⁸

^[b] Assumptions: wheelchair accessible travel; \$4.50/km mileage with \$5 flag fall (e.g. Auckland Co-Op Taxis).⁹

^[c] Assumptions: wheelchair accessible travel; \$3.85/km mileage with \$4.50 flag fall and \$2 unsubsidised service fee (e.g. Wellington Combined Taxis).¹⁰

Table 2. Selected measures of deprivation for disabled and non-disabled New Zealanders.^{2,3}

Statistic	Figure	
	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Reported self-described health is “poor”	13% (89,000 adults)	1% (23,000 adults)
Reported feeling lonely “all of the time” in the last 4 weeks	9% (60,000 adults)	2% (52,000 adults)
Reported “not enough contact” with family they don’t live with	27% (184,000 adults)	21% (681,000 adults)

Submission on Total Mobility Review – Free Fares Campaign – March 2026

Reported “not enough contact” with friends they don’t live with	27% (184,000 adults)	21% (698,000 adults)
Reported difficulty getting places due to transport problems “often” or “very often”	13% (112,000 adults)	6% (259,000 adults)
Personal income below \$50,000 per year	76% (562,000 adults)	49% (1,662,000 adults)
Reported household income “not enough income to meet basic needs”	17% (137,000 adults)	7% (280,000 adults)
Reported no qualification	27% (199,000 adults)	13% (420,000 adults)
Have a paid job, 15–64 years old	56% (264,000 adults)	82% (2,358,000 adults)
Of those who saw a health professional in the last 12 months, reported experiencing difficulty to access	29% (245,000 adults)	-
Of those who saw a health professional in the last 12 months and experienced difficulty: reported experiencing difficulty due to cost	14% (33,000 adults)	-
Of those who saw a health professional in the last 12 months and experienced difficulty: reported experiencing difficulty due to transport	6% (16,000 adults)	-
Of those who were not enrolled in formal education or training recently, but would like to be in future: reported being discouraged by cost	33% (62,000 adults)	-
Of those who were not enrolled in formal education or training recently, but would like to be in future: reported being discouraged by transport difficulties	8% (16,000 adults)	-
Median weekly income ¹¹	\$1,163	\$1,381

We oppose more stringent eligibility for TM

Depending on their execution, we believe that several of the proposals for Total Mobility risk disqualifying people in need of its services. These proposals include:

- Proposal 1: rewriting the purpose statement of TM
- Proposal 2A: introducing evidence requirements for TM assessment
- Proposal 2B: introducing periodic reassessments to continue accessing TM support

By excluding people who are still able to use public transport, we believe that Proposal 1 risks disqualifying many TM users with fluctuating or borderline impairment. The number of users in this category is generally not well known,¹² but several users have reported to us using both TM services and public transport, depending on the extent of their impairment on a given day. We do not believe it fair to exclude people from Total Mobility by virtue of sometimes being able to use public transport, since for those with fluctuating or borderline impairment, Total Mobility still makes a big difference. We also note that Total Mobility fares, even when subsidised, are far costlier to users than public transport fares—already incentivising those with fluctuating or borderline impairment to use Total Mobility sparingly. If the new purpose statement for TM results in deregistration of users with fluctuating or borderline impairment, this risks exacerbating transport poverty for a group of already disadvantaged New Zealanders. We believe that the existing purpose statement for Total Mobility is sufficient.

Proposals 2A and 2B risk further acting as a barrier for people in need to access TM. Even as it is now, assessment for Total Mobility, typically done in-person,^{10,13} is not easy for many—often requiring time, additional travel, and fees that not everyone can afford.¹⁴ It is likely that stricter eligibility requirements, by imposing greater administrative burden on disabled people, will result in some users being unable to access TM when they need it. We anticipate that the negative consequences of inadvertently denying TM access to people who need it will far exceed any of the potential benefits as a cost control measure.

We oppose limits on the number and type of subsidised trips that TM users can take

We oppose both Proposals 3A and 3B, i.e. any restrictions on the number and type of subsidised trips that TM users can take. We believe that either option would unfairly limit disabled people's ability to participate in society—a restriction that, we note, is not considered for other groups (e.g. public transport fare subsidy restrictions based on trip type or number). We also note that disabled people on average face poorer wellbeing outcomes across the board (**Table 2**)—not merely economically, but also in terms of education, mental health, social participation, and healthcare access. Limiting the number of subsidised TM trips by trip type fails to recognise the many valid, productive, and valuable non-economic reasons why disabled people use TM.

We support a national public transport concession for people with disabilities

We believe that disabled people ought to be able to access the transport that they need to fully participate in society, including Total Mobility and public transport. A public transport concession nationwide would help ensure that affordable transport is available for disabled

people, regardless of their location. This would go a long way in reducing transport poverty for many disabled people and improve their wellbeing outcomes.

However, we also believe it important that this concession be funded by central government, not be an unfunded mandate on local councils. This is critical for ensuring that affordable transport be accessible to all disabled people throughout the country, regardless of councils' ability to pay for it.

Our recommendations

Make Total Mobility and public transport free for disabled people

Free Total Mobility and public transport services would make a tremendous difference in the lives of many disabled people. Many in the disabled community have spoken to us about the empowerment that they felt in 2020, when TM and public transport fares were fully subsidised.¹ Free TM and public transport services for disabled people would allow many to experience the freedom of mobility that many of us take for granted—to access work, education, healthcare, and see friends and family without worrying about cost. We recommend that the Government make both Total Mobility services and public transport free for disabled people.

While growing costlier over time, fully subsidised Total Mobility services can still be funded fairly inexpensively. The Ministry of Transport forecasts that, at the current rate of patronage growth, the overall Total Mobility subsidy (including Crown, NZTA, and local council funding) would cost \$146 million in the year 2029-30.¹² Assuming no additional patronage due to a further fare reduction, full subsidisation would cost ca. \$200 million per year—still significantly less than other parts of the transport budget, such as roading.

Fully subsidised public transport for disabled people can likely also be funded fairly inexpensively. The Community Connect scheme—which provides half-price fares for Community Services Card holders and, indirectly, many disabled people—cost the Crown merely \$12 million in 2024-25.⁶ Assuming no additional patronage due to a further fare reduction, full subsidisation would cost ca. \$24 million per year—also a small fraction of overall transport spending.⁶

Maintain the current purpose statement, eligibility, and absence of trip caps of Total Mobility

While imperfect, we believe that many of the present features of Total Mobility—including its purpose statement and the flexibility it provides users—are not in need of changing. Many in the disabled community value how Total Mobility enables them to meet their needs and travel independently—whether it be for work, school, medical visits, or community participation.¹ The Government's proposals for both a more stringent purpose statement and more administratively burdensome eligibility assessment risk denying access to these opportunities to thousands of disabled people in need. Simultaneously, the Government's proposed restrictions on the number and type of subsidised TM trips will reduce the freedom of movement of users who do remain registered in the scheme. We therefore consider these changes to be counterproductive and recommend that the Government not proceed with them.

Conclusion

Total Mobility is a critical tool for allowing people with disabilities to live the normal lives that they deserve and aspire to. Many in the disabled community commend Total Mobility for enabling them to access opportunities that they otherwise could not, from employment, to education, to healthcare, to the chance to visit friends and family. However, the power of the Total Mobility scheme to provide these benefits depends on its affordability, ease of access, and flexibility of use—all of which threaten to take a step backwards under this Government.

The proposed reductions of TM fare subsidies and fare subsidy caps will make TM less affordable for disabled people, many of whom have few other options and are already of limited means. Not only would raising fares for TM users be deeply inequitable, but it would also cost society through the opportunity cost of not increasing disabled people's participation. These negative consequences would occur while providing minimal financial benefit to the Government. Free Fares opposes these fare increases, and instead calls on the Government to fund free TM and public transport for disabled people.

The negative impacts of the upcoming TM fare increases will be exacerbated by other proposals. The proposed changes to the Total Mobility scheme's purpose statement and assessment process risk denying TM access to people who need it. Meanwhile, the proposed restrictions on the number and type of subsidised trips will infringe on users' ability to meet all of their needs and freely live normal lives. Free Fares opposes these proposals, and instead calls on the Government to expand access to TM, so that the opportunities that many of us take for granted can be available to all.

References

1. Doran, B., Crossland, K., Brown, P., & Stafford, L. (2022). *Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand*. <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/assets/resources/research/reports/690/690-Transport-experiences-of-disabled-people-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand.pdf>
2. Statistics New Zealand. (2025, February 27). *Disability statistics: 2023*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/disability-statistics-2023/>
3. Statistics New Zealand. (2025, August 6). *Labour market statistics: June 2025 quarter*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-june-2025-quarter/>
4. New Zealand Institute of Economic Research. (2026). *Valuing access to work: The 2025 update*. <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/resources/strategies-and-studies/studies-and-reports/valuing-access-to-work-2025-update>
5. Bishop, C., & Upston, L. (2025, December 16). *Changes ensure continued access to transport subsidy for disability community*. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/changes-ensure-continued-access-transport-subsidy-disability-community>
6. The Treasury. (2025). *Transport*. Budget 2025. <https://www.budget.govt.nz/budget/2025/by/vote/trans.htm>
7. Disabled Persons Assembly NZ. (2022, December 15). *DPA welcomes news of permanent increase of Total Mobility subsidy*. <https://www.infoexchange.nz/dpa-welcomes-news-of-permanent-increase-of-total-mobility-subsidy/>

Submission on Total Mobility Review – Free Fares Campaign – March 2026

8. NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi. (2025). *Total Mobility around New Zealand: a regional guide*. <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/total-mobility-scheme>
9. Auckland Transport. (n.d.). *Total Mobility taxi operators and fares*. Retrieved March 9, 2026, from <https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry/accessible-travel/total-mobility-scheme/total-mobility-taxi-operators-fares>
10. Metlink. (n.d.). *Te Hunga Whaikaha Total Mobility*. Retrieved March 9, 2026, from <https://www.metlink.org.nz/getting-started/total-mobility>
11. Statistics New Zealand. (2025, August 27). *Labour market statistics (income): June 2025 quarter*. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-income-june-2025-quarter/>
12. Ministry of Transport. (2025, August 14). *Review of the Total Mobility Scheme*. Find an Official Information Act Response. <https://www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/ReviewoftheTotalMobilityScheme.pdf>
13. Auckland Transport. (n.d.). *Apply for a Total Mobility card*. Retrieved March 17, 2026, from <https://at.govt.nz/bus-train-ferry/accessible-travel/total-mobility-scheme/apply-for-a-total-mobility-card>
14. Shivas, O. (2023, August 18). *The Total Mobility process is broken - and no one seems bothered*. The D*List. <https://thedlist.co.nz/newsfeed/the-total-mobility-process-is-broken-and-no-one-seems-bothered/>