

From: Environment Canterbury
Sent: Monday, 7 March 2022 3:19 pm
To: Have your Say
Subject: Submission on draft Annual Plan 2022/23

Anonymous User just submitted 'Draft Annual Plan 2022/23 submission' with the responses below.

First name

Jack

Last name

Cowie

Email address

Are you submitting on behalf of an organisation?

No, I'm submitting as an individual

Which age category are you in?

25-39 years old

Do you wish to speak to your submission at a Council hearing?

Yes

Which bus fare structure option would you like to see trialled?

Option 2: \$2 flat fare for adults and \$1.20 for children across bus zones 1, 2 and 3

Tell us more about why you support the selected bus fare option.

The reason I am skeptical of Option 1 is that, in my understanding, free fares are not the panacea that some advocate. I strongly support affordability, especially in the form of concessions for the transport-disadvantaged, but it should be noted that price is not an exceptionally strong driver of patronage. Obviously lower fares increase patronage -- but the elasticity of demand tends to be quite low. There is a significant difference between what people say and what they do with regards to reasons for modal choice: many people are impressed by the idea of low fares and show a lot of support for it, but when push comes to shove, people tend to choose the form of transport that is most convenient for the trips they want to make, and fares are only a small part of that calculation. Furthermore, with entirely free fares, a part of the patronage that is generated is actually quite low-value -- catching the bus because it's coming and it's free, but you could have actually walked or biked quite comfortably. I'd express particular concern about that for younger, able-bodied users: we do not want public transport to be competing with active travel modes, we want it to be competing with private car travel. I'd also express the concern that, along these lines, a free service may not be valued, and may be taken for granted, both by users and by council and government. On the part of users, paying a base fare establishes public transport as a service of value, as something we have a stake in. I don't think it's unreasonable for the costs of public transport to be split between a user-pays component (the fare) and a general-funding component (the subsidy), and I don't think I'm being a terrible neoliberal for saying so, because the benefits of public transport are also shared between the user (who gets to where they want to go) and the public (who have more space on the roads, and in the long run less carbon dioxide in the air). And to me, asking young people -- including teenagers and students -- to pay an affordable concession fare is a reasonable compromise. After all, what is young adulthood, but the transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence? If fares are free to 25 and high after this, then this marks 25 as the age at which you plan to stop taking the bus. Let's make the transition a little more gradual. From the perspective of council and government, free fares creates a situation where patronage is a liability: if too many people take the bus, we'll have to put another one on. This likely wouldn't manifest in the short term -- I expect a 1-2 year trial would be successful -- but in the long term, it would become very difficult to justify service or infrastructure improvements to those who are counting the dollars and cents. Public transport needs to be sustainable in the long term. On balance then, given the options I support option 2 over 1, although I would give consideration to a compromise between option 1 and option 2, as both have their advantages. For example, fares could be near-flat (with only small increases for inter-zone travel, rather than the massive jump that currently exists), and there could be a focus on generous concessions rather than completely free travel. I support affordable fares. I support the principle that fares are not merely about balancing patronage with revenue, and that the transport-disadvantaged should receive generous subsidy of their public transport usage, beyond purely financial considerations. However, I am broadly skeptical of free fares, because while well intentioned, the fact remains is that the opportunity cost of free fares -- that is to say, the alternative public transport investment that could be made with the same money -- is high. This is already acknowledged to the extent that the proposed free fares are not universal, but I think they still go too far. To me, making public transport free is throwing your hands in the air and giving up. Let's use these resources to make it better with increased service levels and investment in infrastructure so that public transport is competitive with private car travel not just on price, but on quality.

Where did you hear about the consultation?

Social media (Facebook, Instagram)
