May 2024

**To Waikato Regional Council**

Please find attached DPA’s submission on Māhere Whanui 2024–2034 Long Term Plan

For any further inquiries, please contact:

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# Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

**We work on systemic change for the equity of disabled people**

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a not-for-profit pan-impairment Disabled People’s Organisation run by and for disabled people.

**We recognise:**

* Māori as Tangata Whenua and [Te Tiriti o Waitangi](https://www.archives.govt.nz/discover-our-stories/the-treaty-of-waitangi) as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand;
* disabled people as experts on their own lives;
* the [Social Model of Disability](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/guidance-for-policy-makes/) as the guiding principle for interpreting disability and impairment;
* the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html) as the basis for disabled people’s relationship with the State;
* the [New Zealand Disability Strategy](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/) as Government agencies’ guide on disability issues; and
* the [Enabling Good Lives Principles](https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/), [Whāia Te Ao Mārama: Māori Disability Action Plan](https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/whaia-te-ao-marama-2018-2022-maori-disability-action-plan), and [Faiva Ora: National Pasifika Disability Disability Plan](https://www.moh.govt.nz/notebook/nbbooks.nsf/0/5E544A3A23BEAECDCC2580FE007F7518/%24file/faiva-ora-2016-2021-national-pasifika-disability-plan-feb17.pdf) as avenues to disabled people gaining greater choice and control over their lives and supports.

**We drive systemic change through:**

**Rangatiratanga | Leadership**: reflecting the collective voice of disabled people, locally, nationally, and internationally.

**Pārongo me te tohutohu | Information and advice**: informing and advising on policies impacting on the lives of disabled people.

**Kōkiri | Advocacy**: supporting disabled people to have a voice, including a collective voice, in society.

**Aroturuki | Monitoring**: monitoring and giving feedback on existing laws, policies, and practices about and relevant to disabled people.

# The Submission

Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) is pleased to provide feedback on the Waikato Regional Council’s (WRC’s) Long-Term Plan (LTP) for 2024–2034.

DPA considers it essential that investment in council services and infrastructure be maintained, even increased to ensure that the region’s environmental infrastructure and services are resilient, fit for purpose and of a robust standard.

Disabled people are an important population group with 2021 estimates from the former Waikato District Health Board (the latest statistics available) showing that there are 118,900 people living with impairments in the region. ￼

Another significant factor to note is that the number of disabled people is set to increase as our population ages.

When it comes to realising the vision of the UNCRPD, the Waikato is also home to one of the country’s three Enabling Good Lives (EGL) trial projects.

Enabling Good Lives aims to put disabled people and their families/whānau at the centre by enabling full control over the central government funding and support that is received so that disabled people can determine what a good life is for them.

And living a good life requires the development of natural supports, in other words, making the community more inclusive so that disabled people can easily participate in everyday activities, in everyday spaces and places alongside non-disabled people.

Disappointingly, DPA did not see any reference to disabled people or disability in the consultation document, including in areas where disabled people might be most impacted by decision-making, for example climate change and emergencies.

Despite the existence of the BusIt Scheme, there is also no reference to the need for accessible public transport as being the basis for building a universal public transport system.

There is no specific mention either about the value to disabled people of being able to spend time in the conservation estate or how we can volunteer.

DPA would like to see WRC become one of the key partners in building an accessible, inclusive community that truly acknowledges the voice and leadership of disabled people across the region.

This submission will outline how that can be done within the areas of:

* climate change
* public transport
* emergency management
* regional development
* regional spatial plan.

## Climate change

Disabled people will be – and already are – one of the most at risk groups from climate change impacts.

For this reason, climate change, the need to mitigate it and ensure that there are effective responses that incorporate disabled people at all levels is one of DPA’s top priorities.

A recent article published by the journal *Nature Climate Change*[[1]](#footnote-2) highlighted that governments werefailing to take disability inclusive climate action and disabled people are disproportionately more at risk of higher mortality rates in climate emergencies.

This is underpinned by the fact that disabled people have been accorded lower priority in climate emergencies or other disasters and systemically excluded from receiving emergency healthcare and humanitarian support as a result.

The article also highlighted that slow onset climate change, including sea level rise, more damaging weather events, as well as rising water and food scarcity will all exacerbate the existing inequities experienced by disabled people.

Michael Stein, in a Harvard University Center for the Environment (2023) [[2]](#footnote-3) interview elaborated about the impact of climate change on disabled people:

“Climate change amplifies the marginalization experienced by persons with disabilities negatively affecting health, reducing access to healthcare services, food, water, and accessible infrastructure. People with psychosocial disabilities have triple the rate of mortality in heatwaves.”

For all the above reasons, we need disability-inclusive climate adaptation where the WRC, in terms of both councillors and staff, collaborate with disabled people to develop disability-friendly adaptation and mitigation policies informed by research.

DPA has been inspired by the model provided by the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum in the UK where the local council in that city has engaged (and continues to engage in) climate change planning and dialogue with the local disabled community through the forum. The city council co-developed a plan with the Disability Equality Forum (a Bristol-based disabled people’s organisation which is cross-impairment based like DPA) around climate change and its impact on disabled people.

DPA views the use of deliberative, decision-making structures, like the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum, as one means through which Waikato’s disabled community could dialogue with the WRC on the development of disability responsive climate change plans.

We believe that this LTP provides the WRC and the local disabled community with the opportunity to forge a closer relationship, especially when it comes to planning a climate response, which fully incorporates our issues, needs and aspirations.

DPA recommends that WRC and the Waikato disabled community (led by Disabled People’s Organisations like DPA) dialogue over ways in which a closer partnership can be forged and where the issues that concern disabled people in the environmental and climate change spaces can be aired.

The goal should be the development of disability responsive climate change and environmental plans for the Waikato region through the WRC.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that WRC and the Waikato disabled community (led by Disabled People’s Organisations like DPA) dialogue over ways in which a closer partnership can be forged. |

## Public transport

DPA has outlined in past WRC consultations the need for inclusive, accessible transport.

In 2022, Waka Kotahi published independently commissioned research (in which DPA collaborated) entitled “Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

This research illustrated the ongoing accessibility challenges faced by disabled people when using public transport. Disabled people’s main challenges included, for example, issues around using Total Mobility (TM), the inaccessibility of bus services, lack of footpaths and safe crossing points, and feeling excluded from the planning of sustainable city centres, as well as the ableist attitudes of some transport planners.

There were two key recommendations made in that report.

The first concerned the need to take a ‘whole-of-journey approach’ when making decisions around future transport investments to improve access to transport for disabled people. As the report outlined, if both central and local government adopted these approaches, there could be a shift away from relying on making small interventions that address only specific aspects of some trips to taking a more comprehensive approach to journey planning.

The second is that by central and local government transport planners taking a more comprehensive approach, it would enable a transition to an ‘accessible journeys for all’ approach whereby our transport system would be required to provide accessible journeys for everyone, including disabled people.

DPA recommends that WRC take the opportunity presented by both the RLTP and this LTP to begin implementing the ‘whole of journey’ and ‘accessible journeys for all’ transport models within the Waikato region.

DPA is pleased to see that WRC acknowledges the importance of having disabled people connect with their communities through its ongoing support for the New Zealand-leading BusIt Scheme with free bus fares for disabled people holding Total Mobility (TM) cards including any accompanying support people.

DPA recommends that the WRC retain the BusIt free fares scheme as it has truly transformed the lives of disabled bus users in the Waikato.

DPA recommends that a household rate is applied to fund Total Mobility (TM) to ensure its ongoing sustainability in the face of government policy changes in the transport space.

DPA recommends that the Te Huia service, currently under threat through the possible withdrawal of central government funding is retained. If this service is lost, it will mean that one of the most accessible ways for disabled people to travel between Hamilton and Auckland will be taken away.

We recognise that Council also wishes to see the service continue as it is meeting all the New Zealand Transport Agency – Waka Kotahi’s goals.

DPA supports WRC’s proposal to join with the Greater Wellington Regional Council in jointly purchasing new carriages for Te Huia. We recommend that these new carriages continue to be fully accessible for everyone, including disabled people.

We remind WRC of the recommendation we made in our RLTP submission as well about the need for Council to set aside additional funding (over and above the Waka Kotahi contribution) for the first two years of the RLTP to cover the full costs of all mobility passenger service van fit outs in the region.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that WRC take the opportunity presented by both the RLTP and this LTP to begin implementing the ‘whole of journey’ and ‘accessible journeys for all’ transport models within the Waikato region. |
| **Recommendation 3:** that the WRC retain the BusIt free fares scheme for disabled people and any support people using buses in the Waikato. |
| **Recommendation 4:** that a household rate is applied to fund Total Mobility to ensure its ongoing sustainability. |
| **Recommendation 5:** that WRC set aside additional funding (over and above the Waka Kotahi contribution) for the first two years of the LTP to cover the full costs of all mobility passenger service van fit outs in the region. |
| **Recommendation 6:** that the Auckland-Hamilton Te Huia rail service is retained. |
| Recommendation 7: that any new passenger carriages for the Te Huia service are designed to be fully accessible for everyone including disabled people. |

## Emergency management

DPA is aware of the fundamental role that Waikato Emergency Management has played in recent years in responding to the high number of emergency events that have impacted on the region including last year’s North Island weather events.

As outlined earlier, disabled people are at fundamentally higher risk of not having their needs met during an emergency. DPA notes that central government is in the process of drafting new emergency management legislation, which will be informed by the lessons learned during Cyclone Gabrielle and other storms in 2023. It is expected that the legislation will trigger a new set of expectations for councils around planning and preparedness.

DPA recommends that as part of any dialogue on how disabled people and the WRC can forge a closer relationship that the need for Waikato’s disabled community to be involved in all aspects of emergency management planning are accorded high priority.

We also support all efforts by Council to analyse, monitor and manage the risk of natural hazards across the province, including through flood prevention work, such as that being undertaken, for example, on the Wharekawa Coast.

Natural hazards prevention work, such as creating flood banks, is an important mitigation to protect people’s homes in the event of a natural disaster.

Disabled people, especially those who live with mobility and other impairments, face a great shortage of accessible housing, which is difficult to access even at the best of times, let alone after a natural disaster.

Following last year’s storms, we heard about disabled people who were unable to return to their homes for many months afterwards, and some disabled people (as we heard earlier this year) are still living in inaccessible housing over a year later.

DPA recommends that the WRC undertake more investment in flood prevention work throughout the region.

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| **Recommendation 8:** that the need for Waikato’s disability community to be involved in all aspects of emergency management planning is given high priority. |
| **Recommendation 9:** that the WRC increase investment in flood prevention work throughout the region. |

## Regional economic development

DPA sees that the WRC is discontinuing the Regional Economic Development Fund in favour of funding Te Waka, the regional economic development agency.

DPA considers that employment and economic development projects supporting the employment of disabled people should be funded by Te Waka.

In fact, DPA developed a successful disabled people-led employment programme Mahi Tika – Equity in Employment in the Waikato region from 2020 to 2022. In the brief time this programme operated, it placed a considerable number of disabled people into employment using the approach of having disabled peer mentors supporting other disabled people during their job search.

DPA recommends that the regional economic development fund supports initiatives run both by and for disabled people that aim to get more disabled people into work and/or tertiary education and training.

Funding employment equity programmes such as these would be highly beneficial, particularly at a time when unemployment is set to rise and stay high for a considerable period.

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| **Recommendation 10:** that the regional economic development fund supports initiatives run both by and for disabled people that aim to get more disabled people into work and/or tertiary education and training. |

## Regional spatial plan

DPA notes that the WRC is looking to create a spatial plan for the region beginning in the early years of this LTP.

DPA notes that, as part of this project, that a cross-section of people will be pulled together to get an integrated view of the region. We believe that disabled people should be one of the groups represented on any advisory or decision-making body as spatial plans will impact on the ability of disabled people to access the community freely.

If disabled people are involved at the outset of any planning process, it often leads to better accessibility outcomes that benefit everyone, as well as spending less time and money in retrospectively resolving any accessibility issues if these are identified after a project’s completion.

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| **Recommendation 11:** that disabled people are represented on any decision-making or advisory body on the upcoming Waikato Spatial Plan. |

1. Stein, J.S., Stein, M., Groce, N. & Kett, M. (2023). The role of the scientific community in strengthening disability-inclusive climate resilience. *Nature Climate Change 13*, 108-109. [https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01564-6.epdf?](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01564-6.epdf?sharing_token=WG7FDIwxm9EdrpxLpip75tRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0OlD0JgJ93tTQjFULmdry3BVlmuGxD5onmsJt996nkMEGAr2tCBsveYWZXhgtd709bHCKwbcstWptPivtOz4U34R-phYAWEgIDvEDGs0fzjPHcHM0ng8l0DWIje7vQzL10%3D) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Harvard University Center for the Environment. (2023, January 19). *Disability in a Time of Climate Disaster*. Retrieved from <https://environment.harvard.edu/news/disability-time-climate-disaster#:~:text=Climate%20change%20amplifies%20the%20marginalization,rate%20of%20mortality%20in%20heatwaves>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Doran, B., Crossland, K., Brown, P., & Stafford, L. (2022). Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand (Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report 690). Retrieved from <https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)