SURVEY RESULTS

TAUMARUNUI-HAMILTON BUS SERVICE



Taumarunui-Hamilton Bus Service

Survey results on restoring an affordable same-day return service

November 2026

RUAPEHU DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Introduction

An affordable bus service that allows people to travel to Hamilton, spend several hours there and return home on the same day matters to our community.

The former Route 25 provided that connection for shopping, appointments, visiting whānau, education and many other purposes.

Following the move to a dedicated health shuttle, that public transport connection was lost. I have continued working with Horizons and Waikato regional councils to explore whether a new inter-regional service could be established.

Thank you to everyone who completed this survey. The responses provide useful evidence of demand and show what people would need from a new service.

More than nine in ten said they would use a same-day service. One in four told us that without a bus they could not make the trip at all.

Many described the difficulty of arranging a lift, the cost of driving and the isolation that comes with having limited transport options.

The findings give us good reason to continue investigating a service. They also show that affordability, accessibility, safe travel and a practical timetable will be central to whether people use it.

A connection at Te Awamutu is worth examining, alongside a direct service to Hamilton, but the whole journey must work for passengers.

We must also understand what a service would cost and how it could be funded. Affordability is a key concerns and support for a targeted rate is qualified with people needing clear information about any proposed charge before decisions are made.

This report provides a basis for the next stage of discussions. It does not mean a new service has been approved.

The next task is to turn the community's feedback into practical, costed options that can be considered openly.



Weston Kirton
Mayor of Ruapehu District

Executive summary

The community wants a same-day bus between Taumarunui and Hamilton.

Of the 277 people who answered the first question on whether they would use a same-day Taumarunui-Hamilton bus service 93% said they would, with 75% saying they would definitely use it.

For one in four people, the bus would be the only way to make the trip.

93%
would use a same-day bus service **258 of 277 people**

26%
would travel weekly or more **71 of 274 people**

25%
could not otherwise travel **67 of 273 people**

91%
prefer weekday travel **185 of 203 people**

86%
would prefer a direct service **236 of 273 people**

89%
say yes or maybe to a targeted rate **244 of 274 people**

Strong demand

- 258 of 277 people would use the service.
- 26% would travel about once a week or more, and 59% at least once a month.

Everyday reasons for travel

- Shopping and personal services (84%) and visiting friends or whānau (53%) lead the list.
- Despite the availability of a dedicated health shuttle 61 people also wrote in hospital and medical/specialist appointments as a need for the service.

Weekdays travel preferred

- 91% of people who ranked the days chose a weekday as their first choice.
- Tuesday and Monday were the most popular first choices. Saturday and Sunday ranked lowest.

Direct is preferred, but a connection is acceptable

- 86% would use a direct service.
- 68% would also use a Taumarunui-Te Awamutu service that connects with Route 24.
- 42% said they would use either option.

Support for rate funding but with conditions

- 54% support a modest targeted rate in principle, and another 35% say it depends on the amount.
- 8% say no to targeted funding and want fully use-pays.

Easy of booking and affordablity important

- Concession fares (77%) and easy booking (68%) were the top requests, followed by luggage space (54%) and card or app payment (53%).

Few other options

- 44% drive themselves and 31% rely on a friend or whānau member.
- 25% say they could not make the trip at all without a public bus service.

Considerations

- Behaviour and safety on board came up in about one in five written comments.
- Some people oppose a rate or question whether Council should fund the service.

Background

The former BUSIT Route 25 combined health travel with public transport until June 2026. Patients used it for hospital and specialist appointments, with spare seats available to carers, support people and passengers travelling for other reasons.

Following a review, Health New Zealand moved to a dedicated health shuttle and advised that public transport would no longer be included in its new offering citing unruly public transport passenger behaviour.

Taumarunui, and communities along the route including Te Kūiti, Ōtorohanga and Kihikihi, lost an affordable same-day link to Hamilton.

Council has kept working with Horizons Regional Council and Waikato Regional Council looking at how a new inter-regional service may be established.

To make that case, the councils need evidence of demand and a clear picture of what kind of service people would use. This survey collects that evidence.

It asks whether people would use a new service, how often, on which days, how they travel now, and whether they would support a modest targeted rate.

It also tests the appetite for a direct Taumarunui–Hamilton service against a Taumarunui–Te Awamutu service that connects with Route 24.

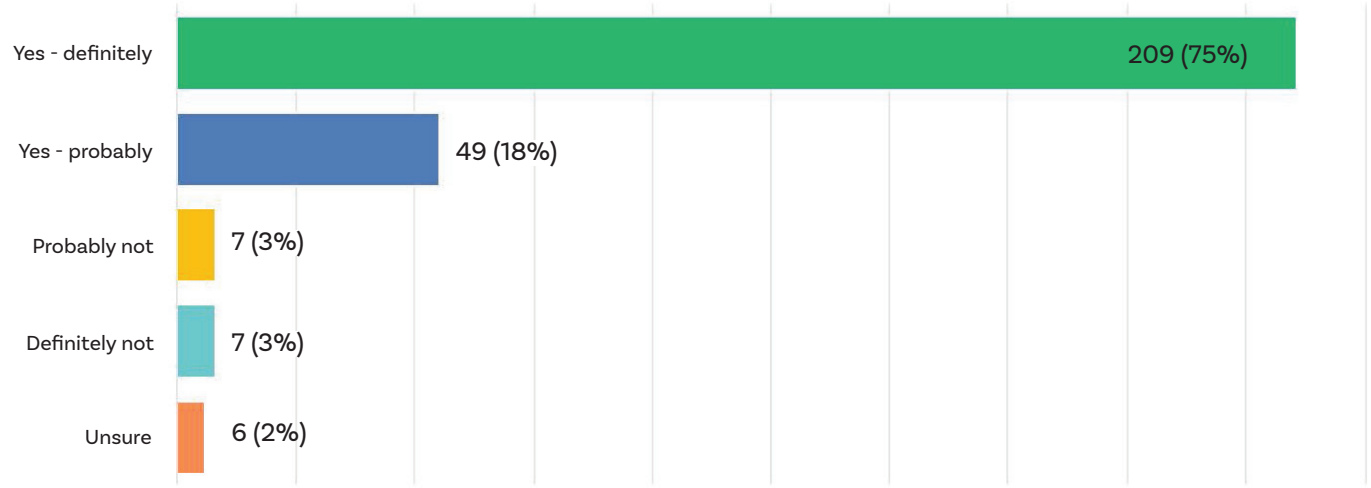
Note on responses

- The survey ran over a four-week period from 28 September to 30 October 2026 in Taumarunui.
- 278 people responded which Council considers a strong result.
- The survey could be answered online or via hard copy (65).
- People could skip any question, so the number of answers varies between questions.
- Every percentage in this report uses the number of people who answered that question.
- Questions where people could pick more than one answer add up to more than 100%.
- This report cannot say who the respondents are beyond what they wrote.
- People chose to take part, so the results show the views of those who cared enough to answer. They are not a random sample of the district.

Demand and likely level of use

Q1. Would you use a same-day bus service between Taumarunui and Hamilton?

277 responses

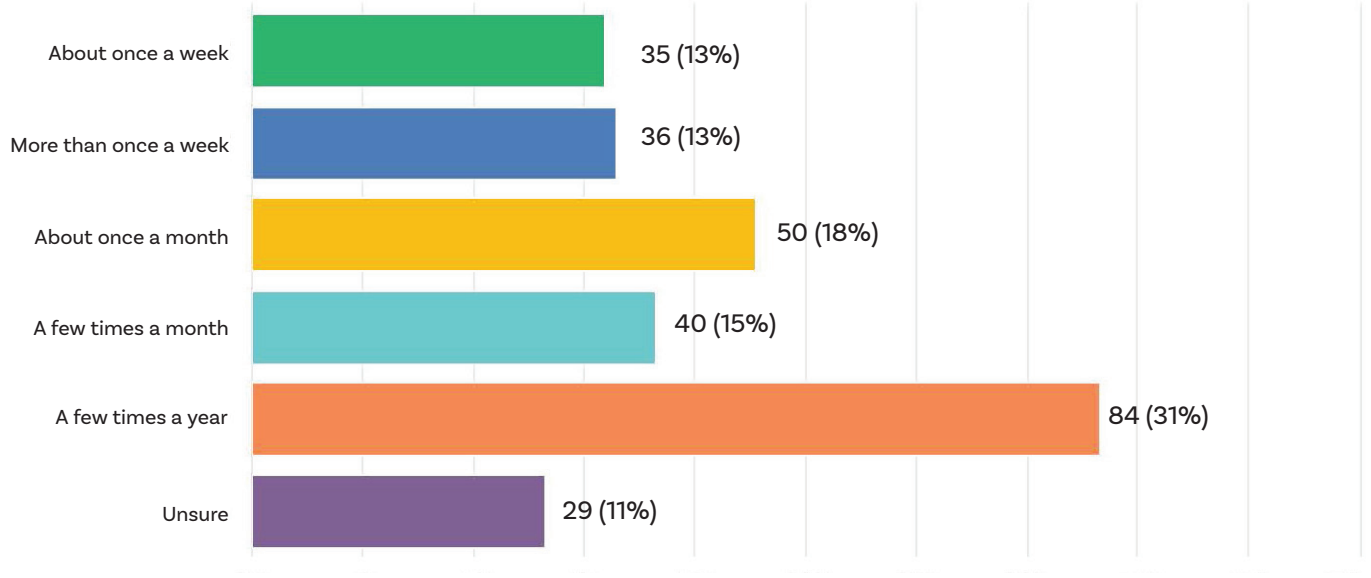


Key finding : Demand is strong

- Nearly everyone (93%) who answered would use the service.
- 258 of 277 people said yes, and 209 of them said yes definitely.
- Only 14 said they would probably not or definitely would not use the service.

Q2. How often would you be likely to use the service?

274 responses

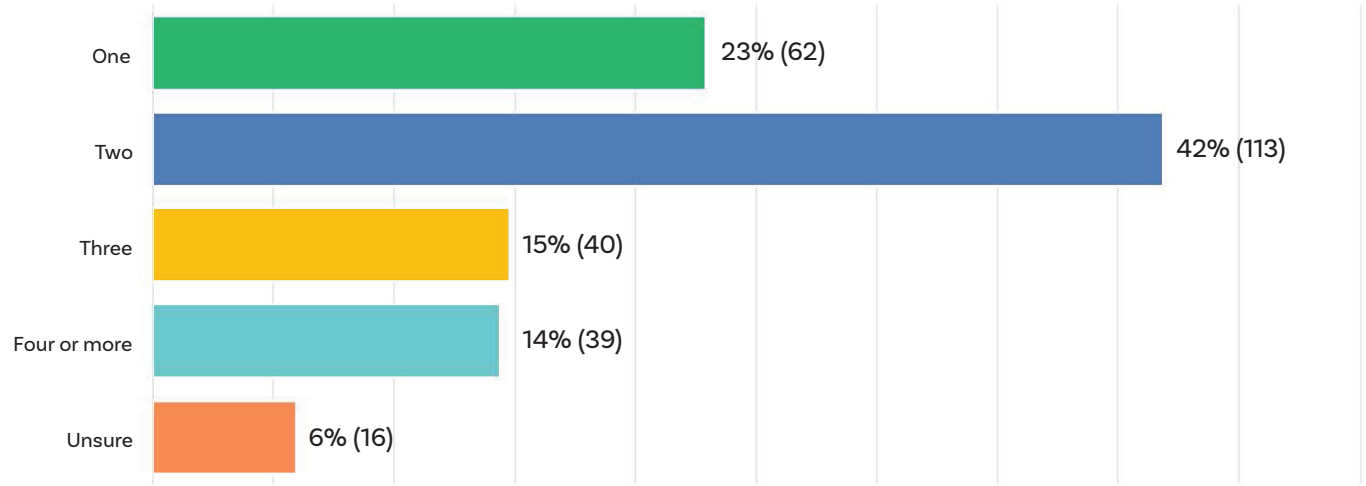


Key finding : Demand is regular

- Many people would travel often.
- 71 people (26%) would use the bus about once a week or more, and 161 (59%) at least once a month.
- A further 84 people (31%) would travel a few times a year.

Q3. How many people in your household would be likely to use the service?

270 responses

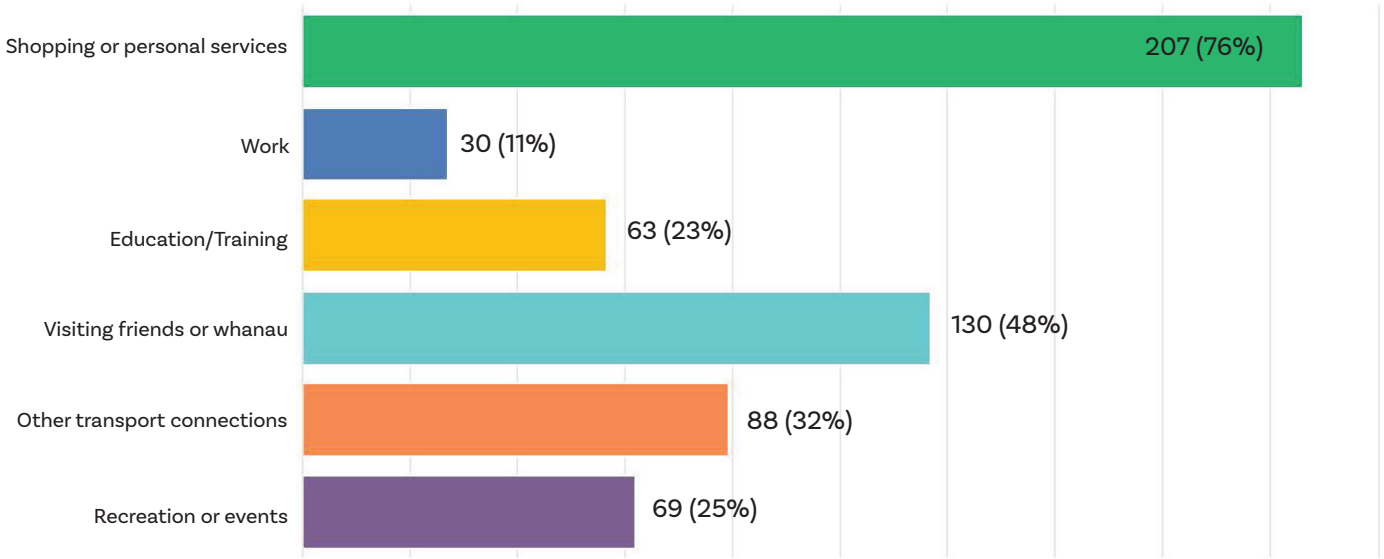


Key finding : 25% of responders would use the bus about weekly or more

- Two was the most common household answer.
- In total, 192 respondents (71%) expected two or more household members to use the service.
- This supports considering family fares and sufficient seats.

Q4. What would you be most likely to use this service for? (*Select all that apply*)

273 responses - % shows % of 273 answering



Key finding : People travel for everyday needs and for health

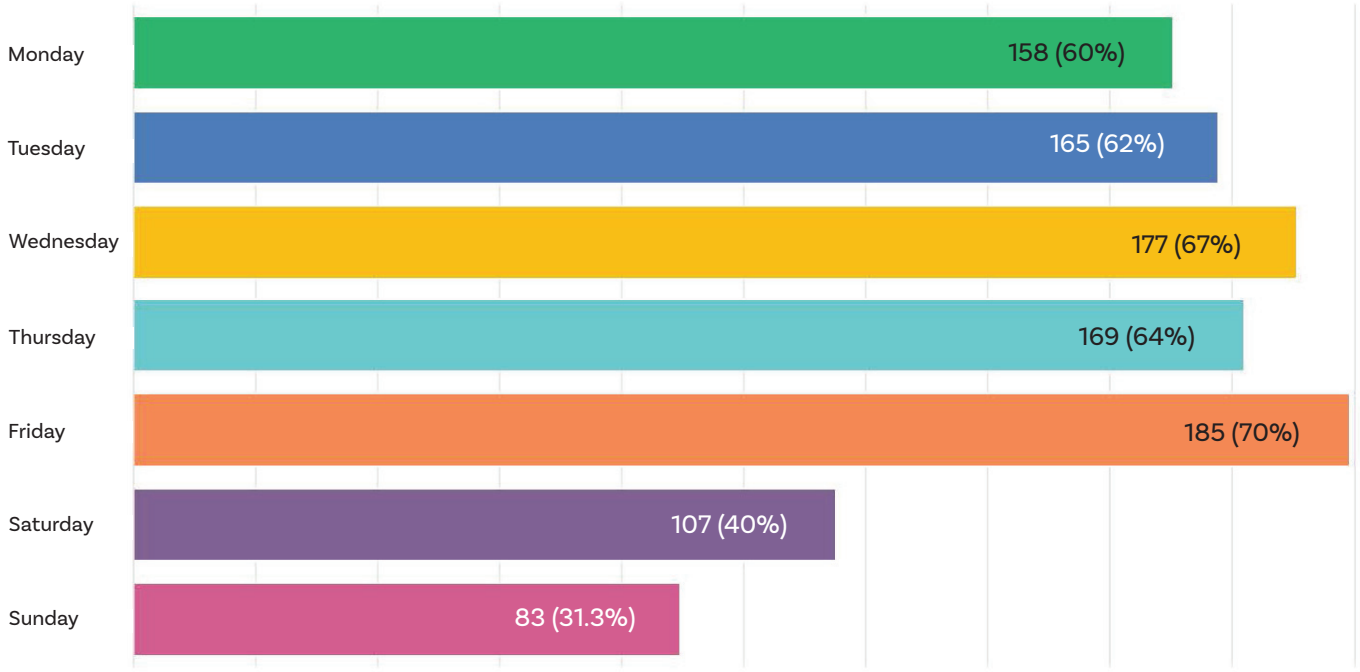
- People gave more than two reasons for travel each on average.
- Shopping and personal services were the top reason for travel.
- Visiting friends or whānau came next (130 people, 53%), then other transport connections (88 people, 36%).
- What people wrote under "other" highlighted the wide variety of travel reasons inc. visiting relatives, travel to/from boarding school, work, training and recreation et al
- Under the "other" answer health travel including hospital appointments, specialist visits, optometrists, etc. was mentioned by 61 people.

Best service days

Q5. On which day or days would you be most likely to use this service?

(Select all that apply)

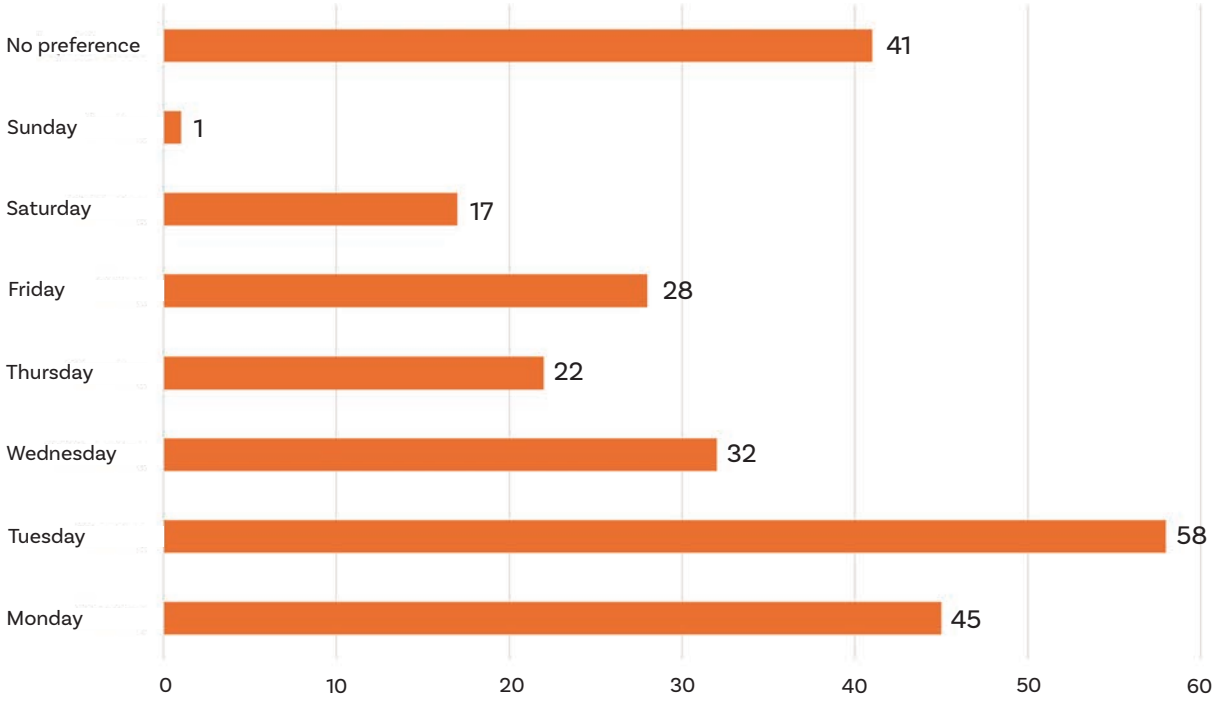
265 responses



Q6. If the service cannot operate every day, which travel day(s) would best suit you?

Number each day from 1 (most prefered) to 7 least preferred)

244 responses



Key finding : Weekdays are the preferred travel days

People want a weekday service.

- When asked which days they would use the bus:
  Friday (70%), Wednesday (67%) and Thursday (64%) led.
  Saturday (40%) and Sunday (31%) trailed.
- The average person picked about four days, and 60 people (23%) picked all seven indicating no preferrence.

Question 6 asked people to rank days if the bus only travelled one day.

- 185 (91%) put a weekday first.
- ▶ Tuesday was the top first choice (58 people, 29%), then Monday (45) and Wednesday (32).

The two questions point to slightly different days.

- Question 5 favours Friday and Wednesday, while question 6 favours Tuesday and Monday.
- Tuesday and Wednesday score well on both.
- ▶ If the service can run on only one or two days, these results suggest choosing from Monday to Friday.

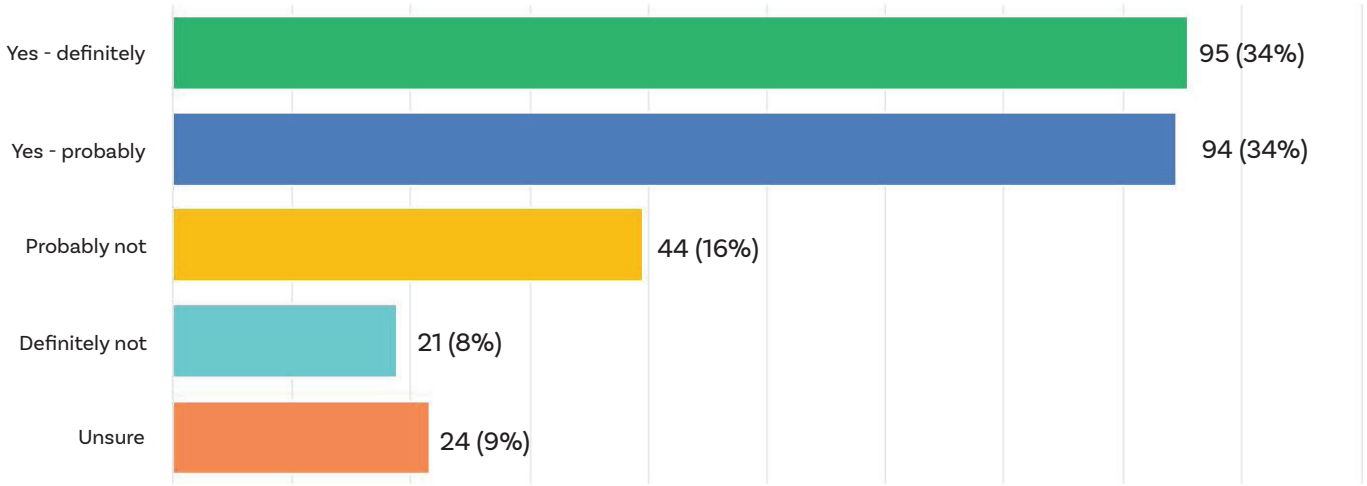
Sample comments

- *"A once or twice a week service would be great. Do not need every day service."*
- *"Return bus leaving Hamilton 4 to 5 o'clock"*
- *"The time of the day the service is available. Te Kuiti bus is at 6:40am. Quite early."*
- *"Unsure which days of the week would be best."*

Direct or via Te Awamutu

Q7. Would you use a Taumarunui-Te Awamutu Service that connected with Route 24 to Hamilton?

278 responses

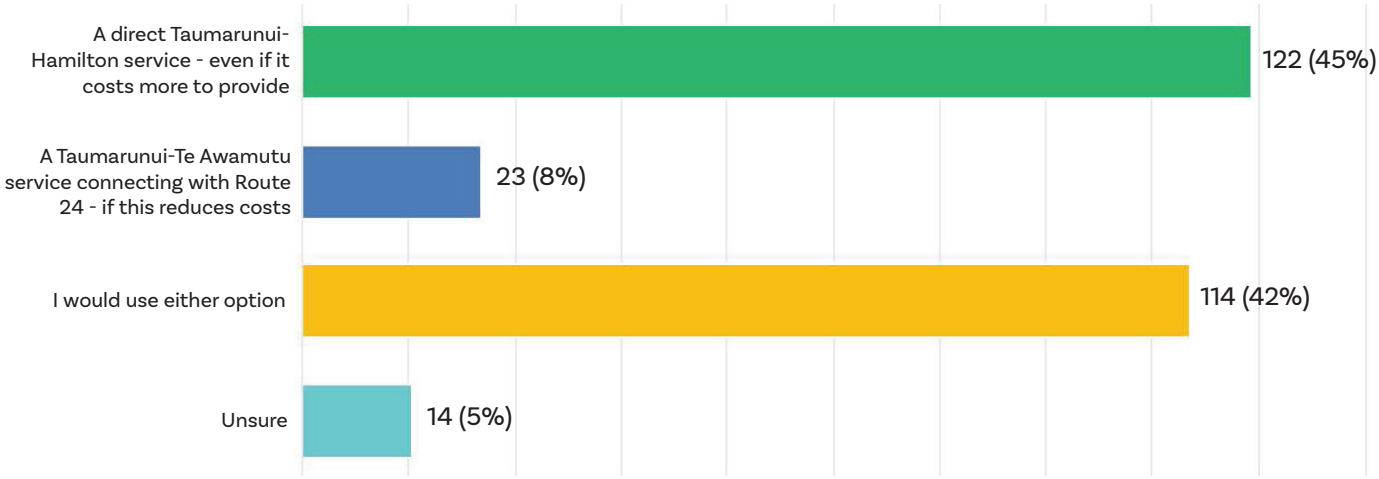


Key finding : Strong support for a connecting service

- A connecting service attracted 189 definite or probable users (68.0%).
- 65 (23.4%) would probably or definitely not use it, and 24 (8.6%) were unsure.
- Among the 258 respondents positive about a same-day service in Q1, 184 (71.3%) were also positive about the connection. Fifty-three (20.5%) were negative and 21 (8.1%) unsure. This indicates a risk of losing some potential users through a transfer.

Q8. Which service would you prefer?

273 responses



Key finding : A slight majority prefer a direct service even at a higher cost

- When asked to choose, most people still want the direct bus. 122 people (45%) prefer a direct service even if it costs more to provide, however, another 114 (42%) would use either option.
- Together, 236 people (86%) would use a direct service.
- Only 23 people (8%) prefer the Te Awamutu connection, even if it reduces costs.

▶ The connection matters most to people with no other way to travel.

- Of the 67 people who said they could not otherwise make the trip, 40 (60%) would use a connecting service, 20 (30%) would not, and 7 were unsure.

▶ A connecting service could cut costs and keep most users.

- A connecting service also asks more of passengers, who would face a change of bus, a longer journey and the risk of a missed connection.

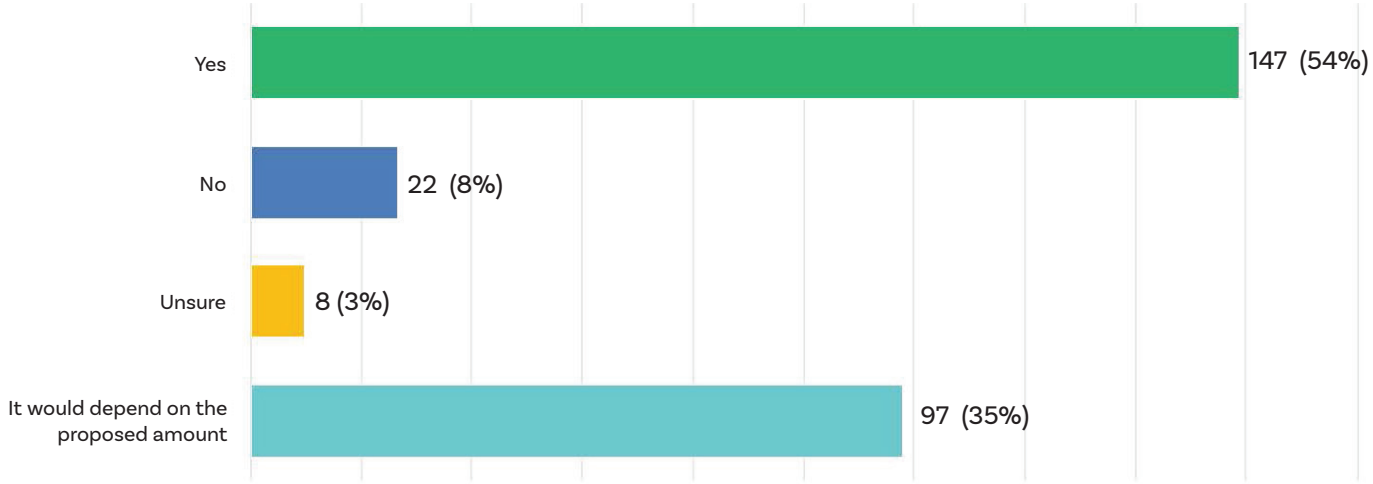
Sample comments

- *"You have taken into consideration the cheaper option of Taumaranui to Te Awamutu."*
- *"If it only went as far as Te Awamutu, I would still use it, but would be more likely to use it as a last resort if I couldn't find another way"*
- *"In the instance of the transfers between busses. What about our elderly who are unable to adapt to change."*

Fares and Funding

Q9. In principle, would you support a modest targeted rate to help provide the service?

274 responses



Key finding : Most people support a targeted rate - if the price is right

- More than half of the people who answered (147 of 274, 54%) support a modest targeted rate in principle.
- Another 97 (35%) say it depends on the amount.
- Together that is 89% who said yes or might say yes.
- Only 22 people (8%) said no.
- Support holds up among regular travellers. 61% of people who would use the bus about weekly or more said yes, compared with 50% of those who would travel a few times a year.

Sample comments

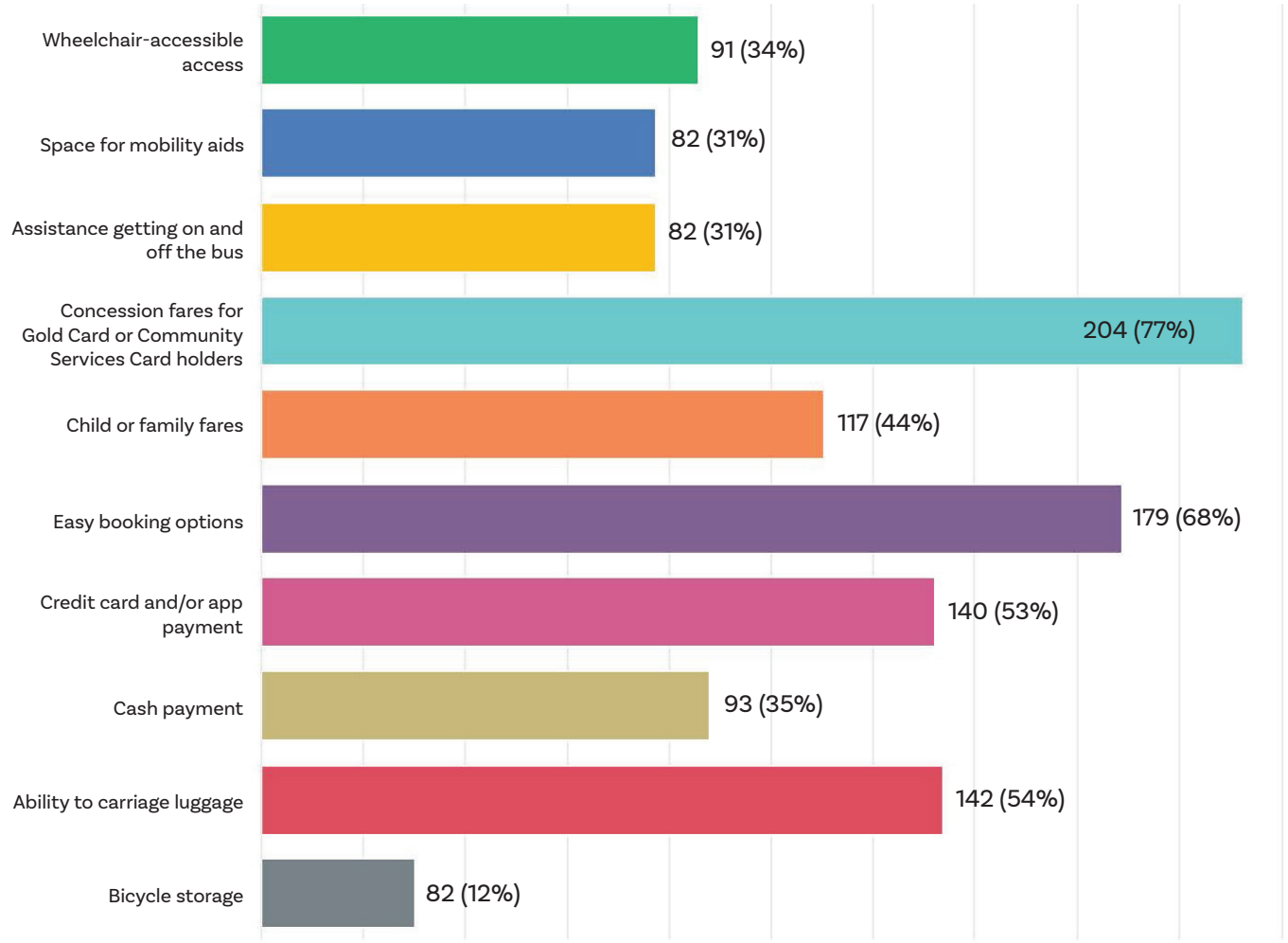
In the written comments, 11 of 114 (10%) object to a rate, ask for users to pay, or question Council's role. Others are willing to contribute:

- *"As a rate payer I am happy to contribute to this service for our community"*
- *"User pays only - do NOT target ratepayers with this"*
- *"A huge amount of people pay no rates especially in large households with many generations. Pay as you go."*
- *"Stay focused on core services, I don't believe this is one."*

Accessibility and other needs

Q10. What would make the service easier for you or members of your household to use?

(Select all that apply)

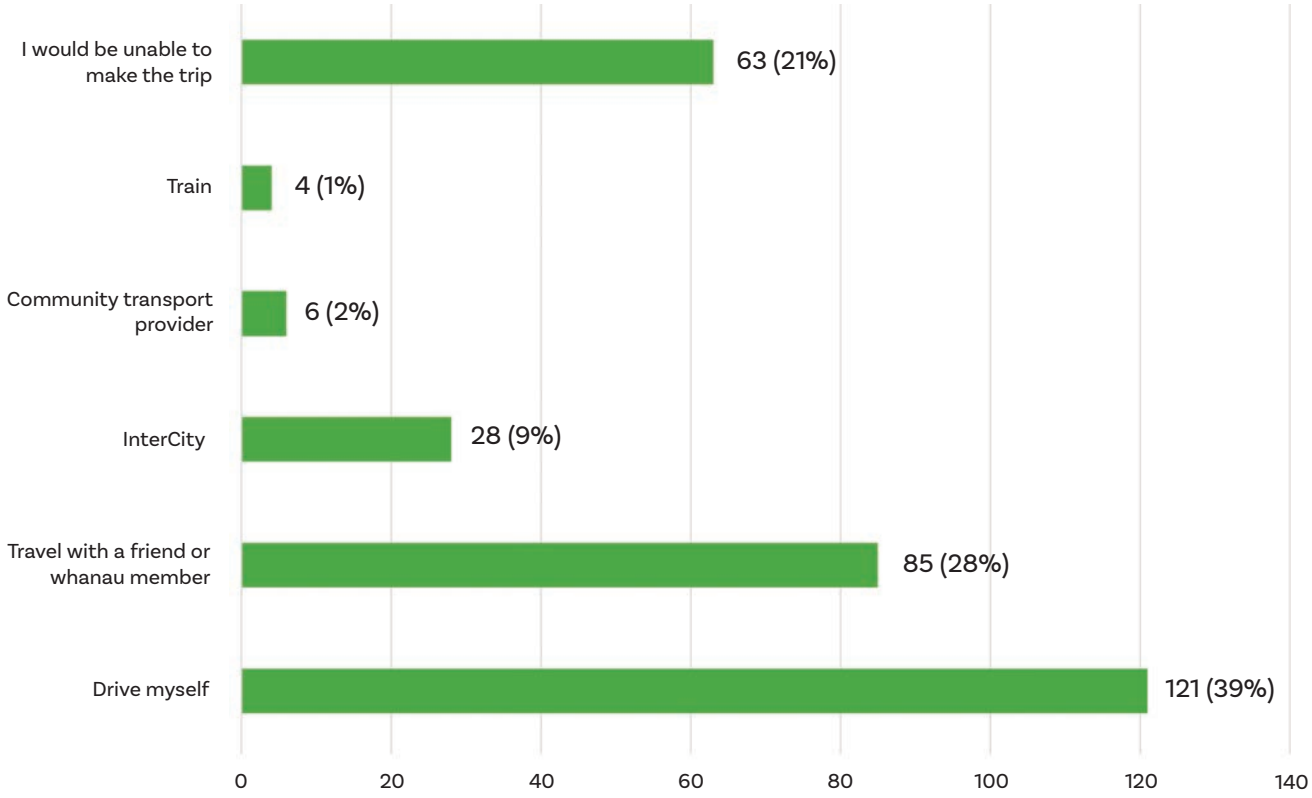


Key finding : Affordable - easy to-use travel matters most

- Price and ease of booking come first.
- 204 people (77%) asked for concession fares for Gold Card and Community Services Card holders, and 179 (68%) asked for easy booking options.
- Payment and luggage came next. 53% want to pay by card or app, and 35% want to pay cash.
- 70 people chose both, and 23 chose cash only, so the service needs to take both.
- 142 people (54%) want space for luggage and 117 (44%) want child or family fares.
- Accessibility is a need for almost half. 127 people (48%) chose at least one of wheelchair access, space for mobility aids, or help getting on and off the bus.
- Bicycle storage was the least chosen (32 people, 12%)
- Eight people added their own ideas. Four of them raised the Bee Card, a seniors' card, Total Mobility or wider concessions.
- The others asked for pre-booked seats, a safe environment, a guaranteed timetable so nobody waits outside, and USB charging.

Q11. Without a public bus service how do you normally travel between Taumarunui and Hamilton?

274 responses - 33 named more than one way so bars add to over 100%.



Key finding : For many people bus transport is the only option

- Including responses under "other" there were 274 responses.
- 121 people (39%) drive themselves and 85 (28%) travel with a friend or whānau member.
- 28 (9%) use InterCity.
- 63 people (21%) said they could not make the trip at all without the bus services
- For many respnders the service is not a convenience but the only link to Hamilton.
- Other options exist but suit few people.
- For elderly people who cannot drive, one person noted that InterCity "means an overnight stay".
- Another said train fares are too high for rail to be an option.
- Community transport and train together account for 12 people (3%).

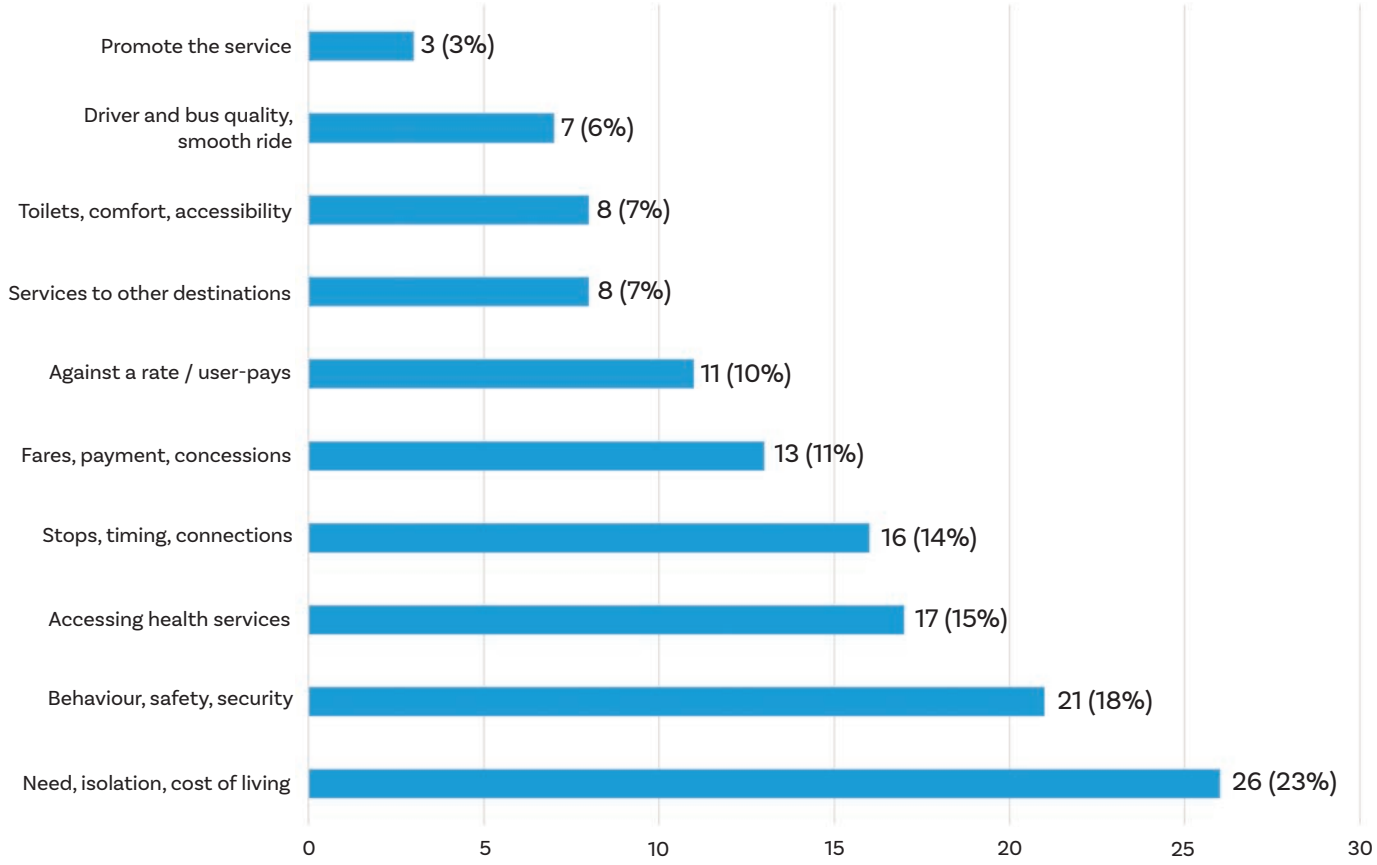
Sample comments

- *"I am visually impaired and either walk from Falkner Park (Taumarunui suburb) to town or have groceries delivered. I often miss out due to lack of public transport"*
- *"Can't drive to Hamilton and back have no vehicle"*
- *"Only if Im able to find a ride which often doesn't happen"*
- *"To expensive on petrol then need $ for a lunch on a very low income it's hard to take a hospital bus due to finances"*
- *"Hitchhike at 75 years old"*

Q12. Is there anything else Ruapehu District Council and the regional councils should consider when investigating a new service?

115 responses - some people raised multiple issues so the combined bar graph total shows a higher count

Written comments grouped by theme



Sentiment analysis

Most feedback is Neutral (62.28%), with some Negative (21.93%) and Positive (15.79%) responses. This suggests respondents are primarily concerned with safety, affordability, accessibility, and practical aspects of the service.

Most comments express a real need for the service, and about one in five raise concerns about behaviour on board which was a key (stated) driver of Health Waikato establishing a new health shuttle service.

Need and isolation

The largest group describes being cut off and short of options.

- *"We are isolated at the moment and two hours away from any major centre."*
- *"We don't want Taumarunui to end up as a ghost town. We need public service to make it more attractive for living"*
- *"Please reduce our isolation to increase our mental wellbeing"*

Behaviour, safety and security

21 comments (18%) ask for firm rules on drinking, smoking and vaping, security or a support person for the driver, and a plan for disruptive passengers.

Several people also wanted to see the original shared health/public transport service kept, and the few who misbehave dealt with.

- *"Don't cut services because of some poor behaviour of few but instead deal with them"*
- *"It should not be the responsibility of the driver to deal with bad behaviour on the bus"*

Health

17 comments are about hospital and medical access, including support people and getting home after surgery.

Note: The survey was seeking insights into public transport requirements rather than health transport.

- *"One bus serving both public and health passengers would be the logical solution"*
- *"Hospital appointments aren't just at the hospital anymore; having several stops in Hamilton would be helpful."*

Stops, timing and connections

People asked for stops in Te Kūiti and Ōtorohanga, pick-ups beyond the train station, and a timetable that works with InterCity.

- *"A stop both ways in Otorohanga would be amazing"*
- *"Service should be coordinated with InterCity to run when they don't in the mornings"*

Other places and ideas

Three people asked about bus services to Taupō, where some have medical appointments, and one asked for a link to Waimarino (National Park) - this highlights the unmet need for public transport services in Ruapehu.

People also asked for toilet stops, working air conditioning and heating, a smoother ride and better promotion.

Feedback summary

Strong interest in a same-day return service

- Of the 277 people who answered the question, 93% said they would definitely or probably use it. About one in four respondents to the frequency question expected to travel at least weekly.

A service would fill a transport gap.

- About one in five respondents to the travel alternatives question said there were circumstances in which they could not make the trip. People would use the bus for shopping, visiting whānau and getting to health appointments - despite the hospital shuttle service.

The timetable needs to allow several hours in Hamilton

- Weekdays drew the most interest. An early enough arrival for appointments and a late afternoon return would make the service more useful - same day travel was a key benefit of the Route 25 service.

A direct bus was the most popular option

- More than two-thirds said they would definitely or probably use a service that connects at Te Awamutu. That option would need a reliable transfer and an affordable fare for the whole journey.

The bus needs to be affordable, accessible and easy to use

- Concession fares and easy booking were the most requested features. Nearly half selected wheelchair access, space for mobility aids or help getting on and off identifying a large need amongst older people.

The amount matters for any targeted rate

- Just over half supported a modest rate in principle, and a further 35% said their support would depend on the amount.

Safe comfortable travel

- Safety and security are a key concern with people wanting better management of any negative passenger behaviour.

HAVE YOUR SAY

TAUMARUNUI–HAMILTON BUS SERVICE

Demand for a New Service

1. Would you use a same-day bus service between Taumarunui and Hamilton?

- Yes, definitely ☐
- Yes, probably ☐
- Probably not ☐
- Definitely not ☐
- Unsure ☐

2. How often would you be likely to use the service?

- About once a week ☐
- More than once a week ☐
- About once a month ☐
- A few times a month ☐
- A few times a year ☐
- Unsure ☐

3. How many people in your household would be likely to use the service?

- One ☐
- Two ☐
- Three ☐
- Four or more ☐
- Unsure ☐

4. Why would you be most likely use the service for?
Select all that apply.

- Shopping or personal services ☐
- Work ☐
- Education/training ☐
- Other *Please specify* ☐
- Visiting friends or whānau ☐
- Other transport connections ☐
- Recreation or events ☐

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Best service days

5. On which day or days would you be most likely to use the service? *Select all that apply.*

- Monday ☐
- Tuesday ☐
- Wednesday ☐
- Thursday ☐
- Friday ☐
- Saturday ☐
- Sunday ☐

6. If the service cannot operate every day, which travel day(s) would best suit you?
Number each day from 1 (most preferred) to 7 (least preferred)

- Monday ☐
- Tuesday ☐
- Wednesday ☐
- Thursday ☐
- Friday ☐
- Saturday ☐
- Sunday ☐
- No preference *(tick if no preference)* ☐

Taumarunui–Te Awamutu Option

One way to reduce the cost of a new service could be to operate between Taumarunui and Te Awamutu rather than continuing directly to Hamilton.

Passengers could connect at Te Awamutu with BUSIT Route 24, which travels between Kihikihi, Te Awamutu and Hamilton in both directions, seven days a week.

While this would require passengers to transfer between buses and would make the overall journey longer it would help reduce funding requirements.

7. Would you use a Taumarunui–Te Awamutu service that connected with Route 24 to Hamilton?

- Yes, definitely ☐
- Yes, probably ☐
- Probably not ☐
- Definitely not ☐
- Unsure ☐

8. Which service would you prefer?

- A direct Taumarunui–Hamilton service, even if it costs more to provide ☐
- A Taumarunui–Te Awamutu service connecting with Route 24, if this reduces costs ☐
- I would use either option ☐
- Unsure ☐

Fares and Funding

Any new service would need to charge passenger fares. Although public transport subsidies may be available, additional funding would most also be required from a targeted rate on properties in the Taumarunui area.

Note: No decisions have been made about fares, a targeted rate, or how much they could be.

9. In principle, would you support a modest targeted rate to help provide the service?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Unsure ☐
- It would depend on the proposed amount ☐

Accessibility and Other Needs

10. What would make the service easier for you or members of your household to use?
Select all that apply.

- Wheelchair-accessible vehicle ☐
- Space for mobility aids ☐
- Assistance getting on and off the bus ☐
- Concession fares for Gold Card or Community Services Card holders ☐
- Child or family fares ☐
- Easy booking options ☐
- Credit card and/or app payment ☐
- Cash payment ☐
- Ability to carry luggage ☐
- Bicycle storage ☐
- Other – please specify ☐

Cont...

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11. Without a public bus service how do you normally travel between Taumarunui and Hamilton?

- Drive myself ☐
- Travel with a friend or whānau member ☐
- InterCity ☐
- Train ☐
- Community transport provider ☐
- I would be unable to make the trip ☐
- Other – please specify ☐

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12. Is there anything else Council and the regional councils should consider when investigating a new service?

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Drop your completed survey back to Council's Huia Street office or the Taumarunui isite by 5pm Friday 16 October

Rather answer on-line?

Scan the QR code or see Council's website: ruapehudc.govt.nz

Help our work on investigating a new bus service

Since the Route 25 Health Shuttle/Public Transport ended in June, I have continued working with Horizons and Waikato regional councils to explore options for re-establishing an affordable, same-day return bus service between Taumarunui and Hamilton.

To support this work, we need clear evidence of community demand. I encourage everyone who may use or benefit from the service to complete this short survey. Your feedback will help us understand what is needed and strengthen the case for restoring this important public transport connection.



Weston Kirton - Mayor, Ruapehu District Council