



**MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT**  
TE MANATŪ WAKA

Total Mobility scheme:  
Proposals to strengthen the scheme

Discussion document

Not Government policy

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## Introduction

Total Mobility is a government-supported transport scheme to help disabled people travel when they cannot take buses, trains or ferries independently some or all of the time.

Under the Total Mobility scheme, the Government, the National Land Transport Fund, and public transport authorities cover part of the cost of taxi services, and in some cases other forms of transport, so users can access them at discounted rates.

Access to transport can lead to a greater sense of well-being, increased access to employment and education, and better mental and physical health. Total Mobility provides this for those who are unable to access public transport independently.

## We have been reviewing Total Mobility

The Ministry of Transport began reviewing Total Mobility in 2023, to consider how the scheme can be improved to create better outcomes for disabled people and support the human rights of disabled people. This work covers four areas:

- Total Mobility's purpose
- how Total Mobility could be made more accessible for disabled people
- how parts of the way Total Mobility works could be improved
- how Total Mobility can be sustainably funded.

Through this process, we have learnt about the important support that Total Mobility provides for disabled people. We have also learnt that there are changes that can be made in the short term and the long term to improve the experience for all the people who interact with Total Mobility.

The proposals in this document build on what we have found through reviewing the scheme. After we get feedback on the proposals in this discussion document, we intend to provide final advice and conclude the review process.

## How this discussion document works

The purpose of this discussion document is to:

- 1) provide information on sustainably funding Total Mobility, including changes that will soon take effect to stabilise some of the cost pressures in the short term.
- 2) ask questions for feedback on our proposals to strengthen Total Mobility in the longer term.

We want to hear from Total Mobility users, their caregivers and whānau, public transport authorities, and Total Mobility providers, existing and prospective.

You can find ways you can share your thoughts and answers with us at the end of the document.

## **This document is only focused on Total Mobility**

This document is only focused on Total Mobility. Total Mobility is just one of several transport supports provided by central government to help meet disabled people's transport needs.

Support or funding for transport is also provided for specific purposes by the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Accident Compensation Corporation and the Ministry of Education. The NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) also sets rules for public transport vehicles to make them accessible for disabled people, such as kneeling buses.

## **Stabilising Total Mobility cost pressures**

### **Total Mobility is a valued and successful scheme**

Total Mobility users have told us they value the scheme highly. It is useful, appreciated, and helps a lot of people access what they need to live a good life.

People are using Total Mobility more. Demand for Total Mobility use rose from 1.8 million trips in 2018/19 to 2.6 million trips in 2023/24. Registered Total Mobility users also increased over this time, rising from 108,000 in 2022 to 120,000 in the middle of 2024.

### **The cost of Total Mobility continues to rise in a way that isn't sustainable**

Total Mobility fares are subsidised from a combination of Crown, National Land Transport Fund and public transport authority funding (council rates).

The Crown's contribution to Total Mobility funding started in 2022 to help with the rising cost of living. This additional Crown subsidy is known as Community Connect. It halved existing user fares for Total Mobility and public transport concessions for Community Services Card holders.

With this additional funding Total Mobility users have only been paying 25% of the fare, up to a regional fare cap set by public transport authorities. Total Mobility trips and costs increased a lot after the additional Crown subsidy was introduced in 2022. This has placing pressure on available funding to provide Total Mobility.

Costs for Total Mobility are expected to continue to rise beyond the amount that is budgeted. This is because the demand for Total Mobility keeps going up. Increased transport costs, including fuel and distances travelled, also play a part in rising costs.

### **Changes are needed to stabilise Total Mobility cost pressures**

It is important to the future of Total Mobility that it is fair, consistent and continues to provide access to transport for people who need it. Escalating cost pressures means that we have had to make difficult decisions on how to address them, to ensure the scheme continues supporting Kiwis into the future.

The Government will introduce some changes to Total Mobility from 1 July 2026:

- The subsidy a Total Mobility user will receive for trips will reduce from 75% to 65%. This will mean Total Mobility users go from paying 25% of the fare to 35%.
- Regional fare caps will also reduce by around 10% nationally. For Total Mobility users, this will mean they have to pay more of fares that are over the cap.
- The reduced cost to the Crown from the above changes will be used to support public transport authorities' costs, meaning the changes will be cost neutral to the Government.

These funding changes will ensure that Total Mobility continues in a financially sustainable way into the future, with all public transport authorities continuing in the scheme.

## Proposals on strengthening Total Mobility for feedback

While these changes will provide more funding certainty for Total Mobility in the short term, we can focus on strengthening the scheme for Total Mobility users and all funders in the longer term.

Proposals to strengthen Total Mobility are in three parts:

- Part 1: Clarifying Total Mobility's purpose and introducing requirements to make assessment fairer and more consistent
- Part 2: Introducing more targeted funding allocations for Total Mobility based on need
- Part 3: Promoting innovation in how Total Mobility is delivered.

We describe these proposals more and ask questions about them in the next pages.

The criteria that we are using to assess the impact of the proposals are:

- **Consistency** – the proposals can be applied in a fair and consistent way across the country
- **Financially sustainable** – the proposals help make Total Mobility more financially sustainable
- **Enables disabled people to go about their daily lives** – the proposals enable disabled people to have access to transport to be able to go about their daily lives, have enhanced community participation and a sense of dignity and independence
- **Implementation** – the proposals can be put into place easily and can keep working.

### Part 1: Clarifying Total Mobility's purpose and introducing requirements to make assessment fairer and more consistent

Total Mobility users have told us that they value the scheme highly. It is useful, appreciated, and meets a critical need in the transport system for disabled people.

However, Total Mobility lacks a clear purpose statement, which means the assessment of Total Mobility users can be inconsistent across the country.

#### Proposal 1: Set a clear purpose statement

We want to clarify the current purpose statement for Total Mobility to make it clear who Total Mobility is intended to support.

There is not a clear purpose statement for Total Mobility, and it is defined slightly differently in different places. We think that clarifying the purpose statement together with strengthening assessment of someone entering Total Mobility would mean that funding could be more targeted to disabled people who rely on Total Mobility the most.

The New Zealand Transport Agency, which provides guidance to councils, defines Total Mobility as a scheme to:

**“assist eligible people, with long term impairments to access appropriate transport to meet their daily needs and enhance their community participation.”**

We are proposing the following new purpose for Total Mobility:

**“to provide subsidised mobility services to disabled people who are unable to access public transport because of an impairment, to support them to live their lives”.**

We think this purpose is appropriate because it reflects why Total Mobility was started – to help people get where they need to go when using buses, trains, ferries independently is not possible. It provides greater clarity and transparency about who the scheme is for and what it aims to achieve. It helps to provide more clarity on how someone is assessed to enter Total Mobility.

## **Proposal 2: Make the Total Mobility assessment fairer and more consistent**

We are proposing to add some new requirements to the Total Mobility assessment process. We are not proposing to change the current eligibility criteria for Total Mobility.

People must be assessed for Total Mobility eligibility by a public transport authority or an authorised assessment organisation in each region. There are national guidelines on how Total Mobility eligibility should be assessed, but we think these could be strengthened to make the process fairer and more consistent. These proposals will strengthen ‘due diligence’ in the assessment process and help to ensure that Total Mobility funds are targeted toward those that continue to meet the eligibility criteria and really need its support.

## **Proposal 2A: Introducing evidence requirements as part of the assessment process**

Currently, there is no requirement to show documents to confirm impairment when being assessed to use Total Mobility. Assessment standards between regions or between assessors in a region is not the same. This approach is also different from the requirements for some other Government support for disabled people, such as the Ministry of Social Development’s Job and Training Support Funds.<sup>1</sup>

We are proposing to introduce the same requirement across the country to provide evidence of the impairment/s that restrict the person being assessed for Total Mobility from using public transport. This could be a:

- medical certificate or letter from a health practitioner, such as a doctor
- report from an occupational therapist
- report from a psychologist

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<sup>1</sup> <https://workandincome.govt.nz/work/working/payments-to-help-you-at-work/job-and-training-support-funds.html>

Introducing evidence requirements will mean more time, cost and administration, mainly for Total Mobility users and Total Mobility assessors but would also help to make sure that Total Mobility is only used by people that are eligible to enter the scheme.

### **Proposal 2B: Introducing periodic reassessments to keep receiving Total Mobility support**

There is no requirement for a reassessment of Total Mobility eligibility after a set period. In most regions, once a Total Mobility user is registered, they are not reassessed again. We are considering introducing a requirement for periodic reassessments.

While many Total Mobility users have impairments that are permanent, it is not the impairment itself that determines eligibility for Total Mobility, but whether the impairment prevents someone from undertaking a journey independently. Better public transport, like kneeling buses, might mean someone no longer needs Total Mobility, even if their condition stays the same.

These changes would mean more time and administration for Total Mobility users but would also help to make sure that Total Mobility is only used by people that remain eligible.

## **Part 2: Introducing more targeted support allocations for Total Mobility**

Currently, once a person is assessed as being eligible for Total Mobility, they can use the scheme as much as they want, for whatever purpose they choose, provided they contribute their portion of the fare. Total Mobility is a 'demand-driven' scheme. This gives Total Mobility users great flexibility for what and how often they use this transport service.

However, funding for Total Mobility is limited. Being demand-driven, costs for the Government and councils have gone up in a way that is not sustainable. We think that more could be done to prioritise funding for Total Mobility users who need it the most, which will help with costs associated with a demand-driven scheme.

### **Proposal 3: Introduce caps on trips based on level of need and circumstances**

We are considering options for introducing a cap on the number of trips available for Total Mobility users. This will mean some limits on the use of Total Mobility. It could be done in two ways – a flat trip cap for all Total Mobility users or allowing a certain number of trips based on a Total Mobility user's circumstances and trip purpose.

#### **Option 3A: Introduce a flat trips cap for all Total Mobility users**

All Total Mobility users would be provided with the same trip cap limit. For example, a Total Mobility user could be allocated 30 or 40 trips per month at a subsidy of 65%. Once the monthly allocation is used up, no extra subsidised trips would be available until the following month.



A different way to do this could involve a reduced subsidy for any trips over the trip cap. For example, once a Total Mobility user has reached their trip cap allowance, they would then receive a smaller subsidy of 50% for any other trips that they make.

This option would mean a Total Mobility user could continue to decide how they use the subsidised fares as needed, but up to a trip cap. This option would mostly affect people who use Total Mobility often. Around 16% of Total Mobility users took 20 or more trips per month in 2024/25.

### **Option 3B: Introduce a base allocation of trips, with additional trips available based on intended use**

All Total Mobility users could be provided with a low trip cap limit, and then additional trips based on a Total Mobility users' individual circumstances and the purposes they need to use Total Mobility for. For example, a Total Mobility user could be allocated a base amount of 10 trips per month, and then additional trips based on their individual circumstances and need. This means that Total Mobility becomes more targeted.

For a Total Mobility user, this proposal would mean less flexibility to use Total Mobility how they want to. It would also be more complex and add time to administer, because it would mean more regular assessment of Total Mobility users.

Here is an example of how trips could be allocated, based on individual circumstances and need.

- **Base allocation:** 10 trips
- **Employment** – full or part time work; contract work: 40 trips
- **Health** – GP/health practitioner appointments; specialist appointments; hospital visits; pharmacy: 10 (more could be applied for based on higher need)
- **Education** – full or part time (university, polytechnic or other providers): Between 10-40 trips based on part time or full-time study
- **Community participation and employment services** – programmes supported by the Ministry of Social Development that provide participation, inclusion and employment support services for disabled people: Between 10-40 trips based on number of days accessing service
- **Other** – other categories may also be included if this proposal is developed further (for example, for those in rural communities): Up to 20 trips

If periodic reassessment is introduced (Proposal 2B), this could provide the occasion to update the allocation of trips for Total Mobility users.

#### **Proposal 4: Incentivise Total Mobility providers to provide more wheelchair accessible vehicle trips**

We are proposing more incentives for Total Mobility providers to provide more wheelchair accessible vehicle trips. This could include more funding allocated to installing wheelchair ramps and hoists into vehicles that provide Total Mobility services. It could also include an increased payment to Total Mobility providers to provide wheelchair trips.

We know Total Mobility users can struggle to book wheelchair-accessible taxi trips when they need them. This may be because there are not enough available wheelchair accessible taxis operating in Total Mobility at peak times or in all regions.

#### **There are some incentives already in place**

The Government, through the National Land Transport Fund, currently provides two ways of supporting wheelchair-accessible vehicles and services in the Total Mobility scheme.

- The Government contributes to the cost of installing wheelchair ramps and hoists in vehicles that provide Total Mobility services.
- The Government also pays an additional contribution to service providers every time they make a journey that involves using a wheelchair hoist.

Some Total Mobility service providers have told us it can cost between \$40,000 to \$45,000 to install wheelchair ramps and hoists in taxis, depending on seat configuration. This cost can increase if more work is needed to modify a vehicle. We have learned that the current financial support from Government to install wheelchair ramps and hoists is sometimes not enough in some areas. The amount may also differ by region (some regions have more resource than others) where other funding sources are available.

We also understand that the current additional payment to providers for wheelchair trips, which is \$10 per trip, has not changed since 2005 despite cost increases over the last 20 years.

We want to make sure the right encouragement is in place for Total Mobility service providers to provide wheelchair accessible taxi trips. This will encourage a reliable and consistent service for Total Mobility users who need it. We want to understand if there are barriers to providing more Total Mobility services in accessible vehicles, and how these could be overcome.

### **Part 3: Promoting innovation in how Total Mobility is delivered**

The way that Total Mobility has provided transport services has remained largely the same since the scheme began in the 1980s, almost exclusively delivered by taxi services, despite changes and innovations in the transport system.

These innovations include the introduction of ride-hail services that compete with traditional taxi services and successful trials of on-demand public transport, such as MyWay in Timaru.

For some people, these new transport models offer more choice, more convenience or more efficient ways of getting around.

### **Proposal 5: Enabling new Total Mobility service providers to enter the scheme**

We are exploring the idea of making it easier for new types of Total Mobility providers to expand Total Mobility services.

Total Mobility is mainly delivered by private taxi companies. We want to explore opportunities for other types of providers to deliver Total Mobility services as well, such as on-demand public transport, volunteer community transport providers and ride-hailing services, which may use apps to book and pay for services. This could make Total Mobility more available, give users more options, and lower costs.

Key things that we need to consider are making sure that:

- any services from new providers would be safe for all Total Mobility users
- any new providers have alternative options to book and pay for those unable to use apps
- there would be appropriate payment systems to process Total Mobility payments.

### **Proposal 6: Introduce a national public transport concession for people with disabilities**

We are exploring the idea of introducing a national public transport concession for people with disabilities. This would be in addition to Total Mobility services, to give people more choice and encourage people to use public transport if that is an option for them.

Some public transport authorities have a concession that provides more affordable public transport fares for disabled people. This is not available in all regions.

Some public transport authorities use Total Mobility eligibility to qualify for receiving this public transport concession. While this can be a solution, especially for people with fluctuating disability, there is some tension with the purpose of Total Mobility.

A national public transport concession of people with disabilities could be implemented through the National Ticketing Solution, which will be in place nationally from 2027.

We think that introducing a national public transport concession would:

- improve the national consistency of transport support available to people with disabilities
  - make more efficient use of existing public transport services
- help Total Mobility focus better on people who can't use public transport due to disability.

## How you can tell us what you think

This discussion document identifies some ways that Total Mobility could be changed so that it can be fairer and more consistent, more targeted and more innovative.

The Ministry of Transport is committed to making sure disabled people can take part in the consultation process. Feedback on this document will help the Government understand more about how this could be done.

We want to learn what you think about the proposals in this discussion document. There is a range of ways that you could do this.

You can provide feedback until 22 March 2026 by:

- making a submission using our online form at: <https://tinyurl.com/murx7xmr>
- using the Feedback form available at <https://tinyurl.com/3nhj2z2s> and sending us your completed form either by:
  - email at [TotalMobilityReview@transport.govt.nz](mailto:TotalMobilityReview@transport.govt.nz)
  - post at:

Total Mobility Consultation  
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PO Box 3175  
Wellington 6140

Through the consultation period, we will also engage with organisations representing disabled people and organisations representing older people.

Information about each of these can be found at [www.transport.govt.nz/area-of-interest/strategy-and-direction/review-of-the-total-mobility-scheme](http://www.transport.govt.nz/area-of-interest/strategy-and-direction/review-of-the-total-mobility-scheme).

## Your submission is public information

Please note your submission may become publicly available. The Ministry of Transport may publish any information you submit and may identify you as the submitter should we do so.

**So, please clearly indicate if your comments are commercially sensitive or should not be shared for another reason, or the reason you should not be identified as the submitter.**

Any request for non-disclosure will be considered under the Official Information Act 1982.

## We may use an artificial intelligence tool to help us analyse submissions

We may use an AI tool to help us analyse submissions. We will take steps to avoid inputting personal information into any AI tool that is outside our network.

## Some key terms and acronyms used in this document

**Community transport service:** a service that is usually provided by a community group or not-for-profit group. It typically runs to meet specific trip needs, such as to pick up and drop of one or multiple passengers at a health appointment.

**Disability:** Disability is a physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with different barriers, may hinder the full and effective participation of a person in society on an equal basis with others. The experience of disability occurs when:

- people with impairments are excluded from places or activities most of us take for granted
- infrastructure or systems do not accommodate people's diverse abilities and needs
- people's attitudes prevent people with impairments from being able to participate in society on an equal basis with non-disabled people.

**Eligibility criteria:** The conditions someone needs to meet to use Total Mobility.

**National Land Transport Fund:** The funding available to spend on land transport.

**Impairment:** An impairment can be intellectual, psychiatric, physical, neurological or sensory, and be temporary, intermittent or ongoing. People may acquire an impairment through an accident or illness, and/or a person may be born with an impairment. Multiple impairments are common, especially with increasing age due to age-related impairments.

Impairments are often considered to be the disability. However, under the social model of disability, there is a distinction between the two concepts.

**NZTA:** New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

**On-demand public transport service:** a service that picks up and drops off multiple passengers within a certain area. Routes and timetables are based on demand.

**Public transport:** Scheduled bus, train, and ferry services subsidised by central and local government.

**Public Transport Authority:** A local government body with responsibility for public transport. Most public transport authorities are regional councils, but this term also includes some unitary authorities, as in Auckland.

**Ride-hail service:** typically an app-based service is where drivers are connected with passengers electronically, for example through an app.

**Total Mobility user:** Someone who is eligible and registered to use Total Mobility.

**Total Mobility service provider:** Transport providers who are approved to provide Total Mobility services.

**Wheelchair accessible vehicle:** A vehicle that contains a hoist and secure area within the vehicle so a passenger can travel while seated in their wheelchair.