

# Hon Chris Bishop

Attorney General  
Minister of Housing  
Minister for Infrastructure  
Minister Responsible for RMA Reform  
Minister of Transport  
Associate Minister of Finance



TCB26-1460

Hon Simon Bridges  
Chair, NZ Transport Agency  
Private Bag 6995  
Wellington 6141

Dear Simon,

## **TOTAL MOBILITY SCHEME: EXPECTATIONS FOLLOWING REVIEW DECISIONS**

The Government has closed the Total Mobility Review (the Review) and confirmed follow-up work to strengthen the scheme. Total Mobility is an important part of the Government's support for disabled people and people with long-term impairments, providing subsidised taxi and other small passenger service trips for people who cannot use public transport.

The Review considered how Total Mobility operates and how it can be improved to create better outcomes for disabled people. It focused on clarifying the scheme's purpose, improving access and consistency across regions, strengthening operational settings, and considering how the scheme can remain sustainable over time.

The decisions following the Review have confirmed a package of follow-up work to strengthen Total Mobility within current roles and settings. This letter sets out my expectations of the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) for the parts of that package within its role, alongside its statutory functions and responsibility for National Land Transport Fund (NLTF) investment decisions.

### **Context: Current roles and responsibilities**

Total Mobility operates through a partnership between the Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT), NZTA and public transport authorities (PTAs). The next phase should proceed on the basis of the current settings: MCERT leads advice to Ministers on policy settings and national parameters; NZTA provides national oversight, operational policy, administration and investment settings; and PTAs administer the scheme regionally, including assessment of Total Mobility users, provider contracts and monitoring.

### **1. Updated Total Mobility Requirements for PTAs**

I appreciate the proactive work NZTA has already done to update the Total Mobility Requirements for PTAs, and understand this work is close to completion. I expect the updated requirements to include the agreed national purpose statement:

*To provide subsidised, accessible transport options to disabled people, and people living with long-term impairments, who are unable to access public transport, to live their lives and participate in work, education, and their community.*

I also expect NZTA to work with PTAs to ensure the existing Total Mobility assessment criteria are applied more consistently across regions. This should include further updating the Total Mobility Requirements for PTAs, guidance and related operational settings, where needed, to improve the consistency of assessments and better targeting of support for Total Mobility users within the current policy settings.

## **2. Wheelchair accessible vehicle support**

Wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) are essential for Total Mobility users who cannot reasonably use a standard vehicle, but limited availability of WAVs remains a barrier for some users. Current support for WAV supply is provided through the NLTF, including funding towards the purchase and installation of wheelchair hoists or ramps and a per-trip payment to operators. Feedback from the Review suggests these settings may not be adequate in all regions or circumstances, particularly given variation in regional grant settings and the fact that the per-trip payment has not been updated since 2005.

I expect NZTA to assess whether current WAV support settings remain fit for purpose and determine whether changes are needed to improve the supply and availability of WAV services. This should include considering:

- the funding assistance available for WAV purchase or conversion
- the per-trip payment for WAV use
- whether additional support is needed to improve the availability of WAV services outside normal operating hours
- any other investment or funding settings that materially affect WAV supply and availability.

Annex 1 sets out the criteria I expect NZTA to have regard to when undertaking this work under section 20C of the Land Transport Management Act 2003. These criteria are intended as guide rails for the work, not to pre-determine NZTA Board decisions.

## **3. Provider standards and safeguards**

Total Mobility is currently delivered mainly through contracted taxi and specialist transport providers, with standards that reflect the support needs of many Total Mobility users. The Review identified potential benefits and risks from a wider range of provider models. I therefore expect NZTA to consider whether provider standards, procurement guidance, complaints processes, service obligations and safeguards remain fit for purpose for a wider range of providers, including ride-hail and community transport where appropriate.

This should not be read as a decision that all provider types must be admitted to the scheme in every region. PTAs should retain responsibility for deciding which providers to contract with, within clear national settings for safety, service quality, training, complaints handling and safeguards for Total Mobility users. Annex 2 sets out matters I expect NZTA to have regard to for work on provider standards and safeguards.

## **4. National public transport concession**

I have asked MCERT to lead further design work on a Crown-funded national public transport concession for Total Mobility users, including a companion fare. This work is intended to improve national consistency, make public transport a more practical option for Total Mobility users who can travel with support, and help manage scheme costs where public transport is an appropriate alternative to higher-cost Total Mobility trips.

Although MCERT will lead advice to Ministers, NZTA will have an important role in supporting this work, because any concession would need to be designed alongside public transport funding, administration and delivery systems.

I expect NZTA to provide timely operational, investment and implementation input, including on eligibility, delivery, refined costings, interactions with existing local concessions, implications for the National Ticketing Solution, and any delivery risks or resourcing impacts for NZTA's wider public transport work programme.

**Next steps: Sequencing and reporting**

I recognise NZTA will need to manage this work within its available implementation capacity. I am comfortable with this work being sequenced in tranches, provided there is a clear plan and early engagement with MCERT on timing or resourcing risks. My expectation is that NZTA prioritises the review of WAV support settings first.

I look forward to continuing to work with the NZTA Board to strengthen Total Mobility.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Chris Bishop  
**Minister of Transport**

Cc: Brett Gliddon, Chief Executive, NZ Transport Agency  
Jeremy Lightfoot, Chief Executive, Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport

## Annex 1: Criteria for NZTA to have regard to when assessing WAV support settings

The table below outlines Ministerial criteria for NZTA to have regard to when considering Total Mobility WAV support settings under section 20C of the Land Transport Management Act 2003.

| Criterion                                           | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Adequate supply and availability</b>             | Whether settings are sufficient to support an adequate and reliable supply of WAV services nationally, including in smaller centres, rural and less urban areas, and whether Total Mobility users can reasonably access WAV services when needed, including outside normal operating hours. |
| <b>Effectiveness</b>                                | Whether settings are likely to improve the supply and availability of WAV services, including whether they provide sufficient incentives for providers to invest in, maintain and operate wheelchair accessible vehicles.                                                                   |
| <b>Value for money and appropriate cost sharing</b> | Whether settings represent an efficient use of NLTF funding, provide appropriate incentives for Total Mobility providers, and maintain an appropriate balance between national funding and local contribution.                                                                              |
| <b>National consistency with local flexibility</b>  | Whether settings support a more consistent level of access to WAV services across New Zealand, while allowing flexibility to respond to local circumstances, provider markets and areas of known shortage.                                                                                  |

**Annex 2: Matters for NZTA to have regard to when considering Total Mobility provider standards and safeguards**

The table below outlines Ministerial expectations for NZTA to have regard to when considering changes to Total Mobility provider standards and safeguards.

| Matter                                             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>User safety and confidence</b>                  | Whether provider standards and safeguards are sufficient to ensure that Total Mobility users can access services safely and with confidence, including where users require additional assistance or support.                                                                                              |
| <b>Service quality and accessibility</b>           | Whether provider settings support accessible, reliable and high-quality services for Total Mobility users, including wheelchair users and users with higher support needs.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Provider participation and proportionality</b>  | Whether provider standards and safeguards appropriately balance user protections with opportunities for different provider models to participate in the scheme where they can contribute to Total Mobility user outcomes. Requirements should be proportionate to the risks they are intended to address. |
| <b>National consistency with local flexibility</b> | Whether national requirements provide a reasonably consistent experience for users across New Zealand, while allowing PTAs to respond to local circumstances and provider markets.                                                                                                                        |