



Community Transport Accountability Reporting

Funding period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024





Contents

1	Executive summary
2	Introduction
3	Snapshot of community transport
5	Community outcomes
5	Who used community transport, and why?
7	Who delivered this work?
8	What limitations did we encounter?
8	Declined and cancelled trips
8	Available volunteers
9	What is the impact of community transport?
9	Closing the transport accessibility gap
9	Contributing to the regional economy
10	Improving community wellbeing
13	Conclusions and acknowledgments

Executive summary

Community transport is an essential, volunteer-driven service bridging critical gaps in the Waikato's transport network.

In 2023/24, the Community Transport Fund supported **18 providers** to deliver **51,464 trips** - more than double the previous year – covering over **1.16 million kilometres** with the help of **464 volunteers who donated over 60,000 hours**.

These services enabled access to medical appointments, shopping, social activities, and support services, helping to reduce isolation and improve wellbeing. Together, they contributed an estimated **\$5.06 million to the regional economy**.

While the fund covered around **17 per cent of providers' operational costs**, growing demand shows how vital these services are. This report highlights their impact and the difference that volunteers, providers, and community support make for our region, particularly in meeting the needs of rural, isolated, and vulnerable populations.



Introduction

‘Community transport’ describes transport initiatives that provide flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs.

It often represents the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people, including residents in rural and isolated areas, older people, or people with disabilities.

Community transport typically:

- relies on volunteers and fundraising
- has low operating costs as compared to contracted public transport services
- can generate significant benefits for communities and support wellbeing by reducing isolation, enabling access to healthcare, education, and social opportunities
- is an effective transport solution in smaller towns and rural areas and complements the public transport network.

Community transport services do not impose fares on passengers, instead welcoming them to give what koha (gift or donation) they can afford. Often, these contributions fall short of covering the trip’s petrol and running costs, prompting these groups to engage in fundraising activities and to seek funding or sponsorship to bridge the financial gap.

Waikato Regional Council established a contestable \$200,000 per annum community transport fund through its 2022/23 Annual Plan to support community transport providers in the region. The fund was formed through a flat per property charge of approximately \$1 through the existing uniform annual general rate charge.

Growing demand led the council to increase the fund to \$300,000 in 2024. As a result of further over-subscription the fund increased to \$500,000 in 2025, with money now collected through the public transport rate.

With over 30 providers known to operate across the region, this report highlights outcomes achieved by the 18 recipients of the Community Transport Fund in the 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 period.





providers
Across the network*



volunteer hours
(17% increase from previous year)

(17% increase from previous year)



 **\$1,516,950**
labour equivalent



(117% increase from previous year)

(117% increase from previous year)



trips by wheelchair users
(169% increase from previous year)

(169% increase from previous year)

providers with wheelchair access

providers with wheelchair access



 Total operating budget
\$1,239,686

(17% of total operating budgets)

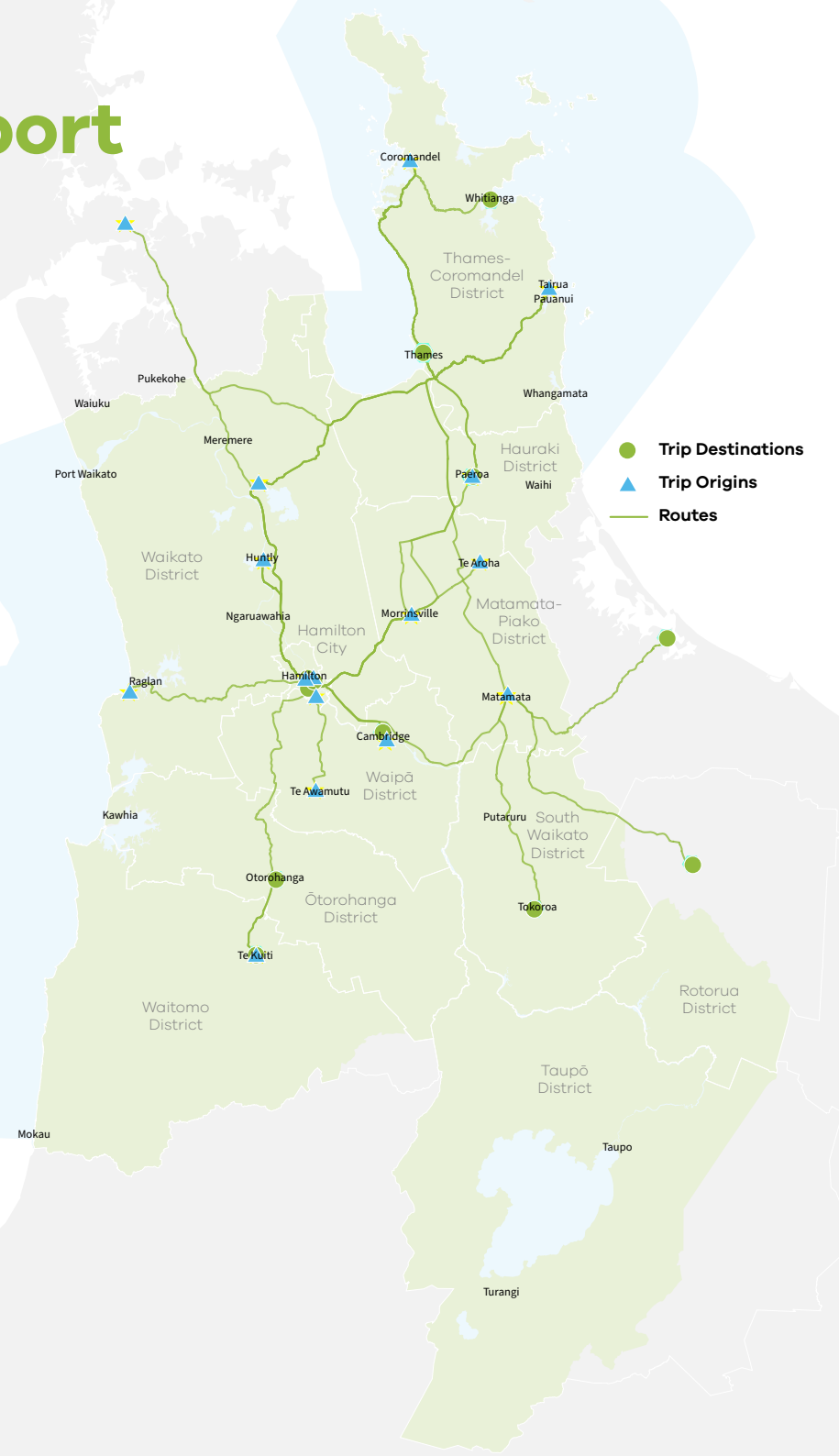
(17% of total operating budgets)



1,165,614km
distance travelled
(36% increase from previous year)

(36% increase from previous year)

*Of the over 30 community transport providers known to be supporting the Waikato, this snapshot covers only those 18 recipients of the 2023/24 fund.



Organisation	Amount granted	Total trips	Total wheelchair trips	Total passengers	Total wheelchair passengers	Total distance travelled (kilometres)	Total volunteer hours	Total volunteers
4H Community Trust Board	\$3,500	946	224	60	3	6,391	2,190	11
Cambridge Community House Trust	\$5,000	1,428	108	357	27	17,770	1,098	15
Coromandel Community Services Trust	\$6,000	110	6	381	3	5,360	228	6
Coromandel Independent Living Trust	\$15,000	1,306	0	3,724	0	85,580	794	11
Friends of Morrinsville Community Charitable Trust	\$13,635	1,570	0	800	0	43,000	3,600	42
Matamata Community Health Shuttle Trust	\$12,000	3,350	20	2,915	10	108,497	14,000	36
Ngā Wātene Māori o Te Rohe Potae Regional Association Inc	\$8,000	72	72	42	0	950	100	10
Ngāti Maniapoto Marae Pact Trust	\$15,000	784	0	161	0	21,075	167	12
North Waikato Transport Trust	\$17,000	3,894	490	274	28	45,606	3,493	19
Paeroa Community Support Trust	\$20,000	1,249	346	158	9	57,718	3,166	19
Tairua Care and Friendship Club Inc	\$10,000	334	44	156	22	35,915	1,276	20
Te Aroha Community Support Inc	\$17,876	2,108	184	1,284	93	94,972	6,148	28
Te Awamutu Community Health Transport Trust	\$20,000	2,558	105	735	54	55,164	3,989	53
Te Kauwhata Community House	\$2,000	579	0	99	0	33,600	890	26
The Order of St John Central Region Trust Board	\$10,000	17,555	1,089	10,446	67	168,506	10,889	49
The Order of St John Northern Region Trust Board	\$10,000	10,528	213	6,325	23	312,252	7,666	46
The Raglan District Community Vehicle Trust	\$9,489	461	19	315	3	22,092	984	18
Waikato/Bay of Plenty Division Cancer Society of New Zealand Incorporated	\$15,000	2,632	0	220	0	51,166	0	43
	\$209,500	51,464	2,920	28,452	342	1,165,614	60,678	464

NB: These statistics were submitted by fund recipients through their end-of-year reporting

Community outcomes

Who used community transport, and why?

In total, 51,464 trips were taken by community transport providers using this fund. This is more than twice the number of trips taken in the previous funding period.

This year, we asked our providers to estimate the number of trips taken for different purposes, as in the Table below. Nine out of every ten trips taken by Community Transport are to access medical appointments. Of the remaining trips, almost one thousand trips were taken each to access support services, such as respite centres, and to access social and leisure activities, following by approximately five hundred trips to access essential services, such as supermarkets and pharmacies. The rest of the trips are for a variety of educational, personal, and transportation purposes.

Trip Purpose	Total trips	Total trips (%)
Medical appointments	47,972	93.73%
Support services	901	1.76%
Social and leisure	878	1.72%
Essential services	530	1.04%
Education	416	0.81%
Personal services	290	0.57%
Other	150	0.29%
Other transport services	44	0.09%



Through the funding period, **10 organisations were equipped with wheelchair accessible vehicles and undertook 2,920 trips.** This is more than 1.5 times the wheelchair trips taken in the previous funding period.

We asked providers to tell us about the most popular destinations for trips on community transport so we can identify the gaps in our public transport network. We intend to ask for more information in the future.

Many community transport trips are along the corridor from Tokoroa through to Matamata, Te Aroha, Paeroa, and Thames – towns currently underserved by regional bus services, which often require detours through Hamilton and can be longer and more expensive trips. This insight will help us better understand where public transport gaps exist and how community transport complements the network.



Who delivered this work?

A distinguishing feature of community transport is that it is delivered by volunteers and does not charge a fare for transport (though providers can accept koha (gift/donation) to help cover operating costs).

Through this funding period, **464 volunteers donated 60,678 hours of time** across driving, administration, and coordination roles. Volunteers are an invaluable part of community transport. Passengers frequently praise not only the service itself, but the kindness and connection volunteers provide.

“ [The volunteer drivers in Paeroa are] always caring and compassionate with a sense of humour thrown in as well. Staying with me for the duration of my appointments is much appreciated, too.”

We estimate the value¹ of those volunteer hours to the community is \$1,516,950.

The volunteers deliver community transport through a fleet of 102 vehicles, primarily consisting of small vans (seating 12 or fewer passengers, including the driver) and passenger vehicles, which can also include private vehicles owned by volunteers. There are 20 wheelchair accessible vehicles operated by 10 community transport providers.

Vehicle type	Number of vehicles	Number of vehicles (%)
Vans seating 12 or fewer	52	50.98%
Smaller passenger vehicles	24	23.53%
Wheelchair accessible vehicles	20	19.61%
Other	6	5.88%

Some providers told us about their intentions to invest in new vehicles for their service, particularly wheelchair accessible and seat height adjustable vehicles. At this stage, the Community Transport Fund only covers operational costs and therefore our grants cannot be used for capital costs (such as purchasing a new vehicle).



1 We estimate the value by using the median wage for a driver or an administrator, which is in the range of \$25 p/h. See <https://www.careers.govt.nz/jobs-database/>.

What limitations did we encounter?

Declined and cancelled trips

Due to limited resources, community transport providers cannot fulfil every request for a trip and must sometimes decline trip requests. We are interested in why community transport providers are declining trips so that we can provide better support.

Over the funding period, 198 trip requests were declined.

In only 52 cases, trips were not taken due to insufficient notice provided by the passenger. In 19 cases, trips were not taken due to behavioural or safety concerns. **In the remaining cases, providers had operational limitations which led to the trip decline**, such as the origin/destination being outside the operational area or time, vehicles and volunteers being unavailable (due to already committing to other trips), or the requested transportation being unavailable (such as wheelchair accessible vehicles).

Decline reason	Total declined trips	Total declined trips (%)
Vehicles unavailable	65	32.83%
Insufficient notice	52	26.26%
Origin/destination outside operational area/time	48	24.24%
Behavioural or safety concerns	19	9.60%
Requested transportation unavailable (i.e., wheelchair enabled)	7	3.54%
Volunteers unavailable	7	3.54%

In addition, 2,785 trips were cancelled. Cancellations are generally initiated by the prospective passenger due to appointment cancellations/reschedules or arrangement of other transport. The user may also be unwell on the day of travel. In a few cases, appropriate transport (e.g., booster seats for children) were unavailable, and in one extraordinary case, a road was closed due to slips, requiring all scheduled trips to be cancelled.

Available volunteers

Given that community transport is particularly dependent on volunteer labour, we are interested in understanding how the number of volunteers assisting in each community transport programme is changing.

There were 464 volunteers supporting those 18 community transport providers across the Waikato in the 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 period.

While there are some community transport providers which express concern at finding and maintaining a pool of volunteers, the majority of providers told us this was not a current challenge for them. While some organisations have lost volunteers over the funding period, there was a net gain of 20 volunteers, which indicates some stability in the sector as a whole.

What is the impact of community transport?

Closing the transport accessibility gap

For many people in the Waikato, public transport is limited or unavailable, and private options like taxis either may not be available or might otherwise be unaffordable or impractical. Community transport fills this gap, offering a lifeline for those who are unable to drive or access other transport options.

This service is deeply valued by the communities it serves. **The people living in these communities donated more than \$17,000 to these community transport organisations during the funding period.**

Contributing to the regional economy

Research on community transport in contemporary countries tells us that money invested into subsidised transportation benefits the wider economy through reduced costs associated with missed medical appointments, delayed treatment, and premature moves into assisted living facilities. It also helps people stay engaged with local shops, services, and activities.

In addition to volunteer labour valued at \$1,516,950, some community transport organisations employ administrators to manage bookings and coordinate volunteer shifts. **The value of wages reported for paid staff is \$405,534 across all 18 providers in this funding period.** Considering the direct, indirect, and induced effects of this money invested in community transport, **we estimate the gross value added to the Waikato regional economy to be \$5,056,133².**

This demonstrates that every dollar invested in community transport delivers strong social and economic returns, benefiting not just those who use the service but the region as a whole.



² Calculated by multiplying the value of paid and volunteer labour by the Input-Output Type II Multiplier – 2.63 (in the category “Health and Social Services”). Output multipliers relate a unit of spending to an increase in output in the economy, with Type II multipliers representing the sum of direct, indirect, and induced spending in the economy.

See Table 4.4, McDonald G., & Patterson M. (2008). Auckland Economy and its Interactions with the Environment: Insights from Input-Output Analysis. New Zealand Centre for Ecological Economics.

Improving community wellbeing

We heard from several providers, volunteers, and users about the benefit that community transport has for their wellbeing:

“ One of our clients served Te Kūiti for over 45 years before losing 80% of her sight. With no taxi services available, our van is the only way to remain in the town she loves. We take her to the medical centre and hospital and assist with shopping, choosing clothes, and everyday tasks that would otherwise be overwhelming when she is out of her home. Without our support, she would have to move to Hamilton, where services are available but at the cost of losing her independence, church, and close-knit community.”

“ The absence of reliable public transport in Taumarunui – with no taxi service, no town bus, and limited mobility van access – profoundly impacts the lives and well-being of our community members. Our dedicated transportation service directly addresses this void, enabling access to essential medical appointments, vital personal services, and enriching community programmes.”

“ [Waikato/Bay of Plenty Division Cancer Society of New Zealand Incorporated] are wonderful. And I’ve met people at chemotherapy. There’s a community – it’s very real. There’s an eclectic amount of different people, some very sad stories, but some wonderful, good stories, too. I hope the best for all of us.”



“If it wasn’t for the volunteer drivers, I’d probably have to catch the bus. But after radiation, you’re in a daze. It’s good to know that afterwards, there’s someone there to take care of you and get you home.”

“The St John Health Shuttle [Central Region Waikato] is a lifeline for many in our community, offering a free transport service to help people attend essential medical and health appointments. With over 65,000 trips made each year, this service is invaluable for older adults, individuals who are too unwell to drive, and those who don’t have access to other transport options. The volunteer drivers and assistants play a vital role in ensuring clients get to their appointment safely and on time then returned home. The health shuttle role is about connecting with people and supporting them during times when they need it most. The volunteers are first aid trained and carry a defibrillator in the vehicle for any emergency.”



“For many of the people we held, we are not only a reliable way to get to appointments but also a chance to get out in the world for a little while. We often take people on a bit of a tiki tour while picking up or dropping off others on a particular run.”

“I had the pleasure of transporting a woman to an appointment at Waikato Hospital for the first time. She was anxious and worried about getting to the correct place. I reassured her and promised to take her directly to her appointment. I introduced her to other passengers, and there were lively conversations between them all... I escorted her to her appointment and was even free to sit with her until she saw the specialist. I later escorted her back to the shuttle. Her appreciation for the door-to-door service and the care and support she received was greatly appreciated... Many we transport have no family living close by [which means that] having this service means they can get to their appointments safely and do not have to rely on their family to take time off work and come and take them to appointments.”



Conclusions and acknowledgments

The Community Transport Fund is making a positive difference by supporting community transport operators to provide for the social, economic and wellbeing needs of their communities.

The 2023/24 funding period has seen 51,464 trips made and 464 volunteers donating 60,678 hours of time – a remarkable effort that ensured people could reach essential appointments, stay connected, and remain part of their communities.

These results highlight how vital community transport is, particularly in areas where few other options exist. Without these volunteer-led services, many residents would face significant barriers to accessing healthcare, services, and social opportunities.

We would like to thank the Communications and Marketing, Spatial Information and Management, and Regional Transport Connections teams for their assistance in preparing this report, and acknowledge the support of Waikato regional councillors in making this fund possible.

Most importantly, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the **volunteers, providers, and community groups** who make community transport a reality. Your dedication and generosity are invaluable, and the impact of your work is felt throughout our region every day.





Policy Series 2025/20
ISSN 2230-4339 (Print)
ISSN 2230-4347 (Online)
September 2025 #7600

Private Bag 3038, Waikato Mail Centre,
Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
waikatoregion.govt.nz
0800 800 401