

Transport needs in Mercury Bay



Report prepared for Waikato Regional Council by Bridget Doran

1 September 2025

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Summary

There is significant unmet need for access within Mercury Bay. For people who cannot afford to travel by car or who have no independent access to transport, options are limited, expensive, and effortful. There is inequity in this community because there are significant populations with both a lot, and very little disposable income.

There are volunteer-based community transport and government subsidised Total Mobility (taxi) services in the area, but they cannot meet everyone's needs. Demand is growing due to an ageing and increasingly diverse population. Furthermore, there simply are not enough services in Whitianga (the main town) to meet everyone's needs, resulting in trips to Thames which are longer, more difficult, and more expensive.

A significant challenge is access across Mercury Bay itself. The options are a brief ferry ride which currently costs \$4 per adult, per trip, or a 40km trip by road. There is no Total Mobility discount on the ferry. These options are not affordable for the poorest people in the community.

Through a community meeting and analysis of possible solutions to these challenges, this report concludes that more could be done to improve equity of access in Mercury Bay. The recommendations are for Waikato Regional Council to collaborate with local stakeholders to:

1. Support the Whitianga Ferry to become a Total Mobility provider: collaboration between Waikato Regional Council and Whitianga Ferry
2. Support access across the harbour with a special Waikato Regional Council grant for discounted ferry trips, to be administered by a local community provider in collaboration with community, including with Whitianga Ferry
3. Investigate and support ways for public services to return to Mercury Bay: Collaboration between Waikato Regional Council, Thames Coromandel District Council, local community representatives including Community Waikato, Ministry of Social Development, NZ Transport Agency (driver licencing), and Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Social Development's Heartland Services scheme would appear to be a good candidate to address some access challenges in Mercury Bay.

Introduction

This report describes an investigation into unmet need for transport in Mercury Bay. It addresses two specific questions:

- 1) Crossing between Whitianga and Ferry Landing: What are the unmet transport needs of people wanting to access areas on either side of Mercury Bay?
- 2) Broader access issues in Mercury Bay: What are the other unmet transport needs of people in Mercury Bay?

The questions have been investigated with background information from stakeholders in the area, and an in-person meeting held in Whitianga on 30 June 2025. Letters of support for this investigation were received by a range of stakeholders (see Appendix).

The Mercury Bay population

The community is on the eastern coast of the Coromandel Peninsula. The main settlement is Whitianga. Mercury Bay is shown in the map below.

The population of Whitianga is currently 7,600. There are an estimated 2,736 people over the age of 65 in Mercury Bay (data provided by Whitianga Community Services Trust, 2025), of which around one quarter (estimated 537 people aged over 65 years) live on the southern side of the water. It is noted of course that in addition to the resident population there is a large seasonal influx of visitors, with many holiday homes and holiday rentals in the area.

The population is diverse in two ways of relevance for this report: residents vs visitors and people with holiday homes; and in terms of income.

The resident population, as described above, is different in demographics from visitors and those with holiday homes. There is significant income diversity in Mercury Bay. 27% of the population report a household income of \$50,000 or less. At the other end of the income spectrum, 17% of households report an annual income above \$150,000 (Statistics NZ, 2023 Census).

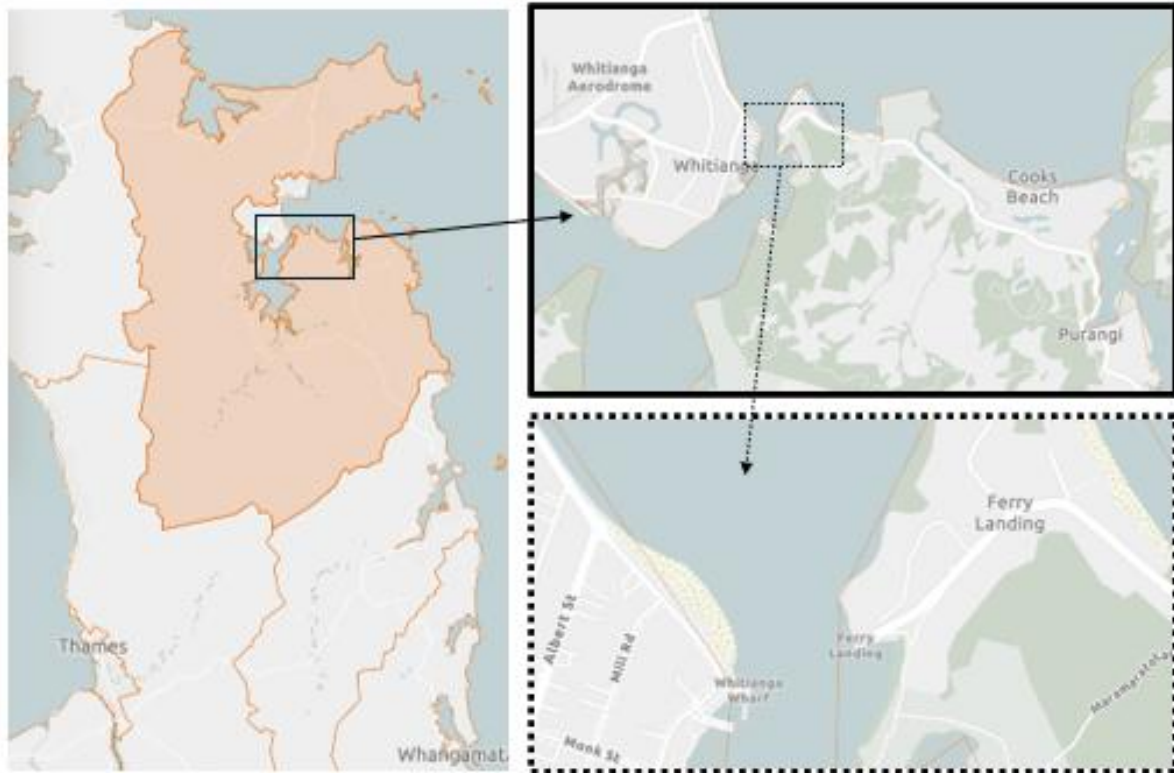


Figure 1 Mercury Bay, Whitianga, Cooks Beach, and Ferry Landing: Statistical Area 3 units of Mercury Bay (orange) and Whitianga (white, on the coast and surrounded by Mercury Bay)

Transport in Mercury Bay

There are no scheduled public transport services in Mercury Bay. There is a taxi provider (Whiti City Cabs), and a private ferry (see below). The local Community Transport provider, Whitianga Community Services Trust, provides partially funded transport to specialist medical services at Thames and Waikato hospitals. This provider relies on 16 volunteer drivers making an average of 172 trips annually. Community transport is also provided locally by Hato Hone St John. In addition to these reported trips, there is of course significant informal ride sharing in Mercury Bay, as there is in all rural New Zealand communities. Local people do their best to meet local needs, but the transport system is far from robust, reliable, or accessible to everyone.

In summary, most people in Mercury Bay rely on their own cars for most of their travel within and beyond the area.

Question 1: Crossing between Whitianga and Ferry Landing

Access between Whitianga and Ferry Landing is via approximately 40km of road travel, or a 180m harbour crossing. The trip by road takes approximately 40 minutes on average.

There has been a ferry operating for paying passengers between Whitianga and Ferry Landing since the 19th Century ([History | Whitianga Ferry](#)). The current ferry operates 12-13 hours per day on a continuous return trip, approximately every ten minutes from each side, 365 days per year.

The ferry is privately operated. Trip costs are shown in the Table below. The ferry operator will also take cargo across the water for a fee of \$2 per item.

Table 1 Ferry charges between Whitianga Wharf and Ferry Landing

Fares	Single	Return
Adult	\$5.50	\$8.00
Child	\$3.50	\$6.00
Bicycle	\$1.50	\$3.00

To get to and from the ferry on both sides, passengers can travel by car, walk, or cycle. There are taxi services on both sides of the water. There is also car parking on both sides.

The ferry is accessible for most passengers, including people who use wheelchairs. The ferry operator has a ramp to enable access on and off the boat, and will assist any passengers who need help to use the ramps on wharves at either side. The informal nature of the ferry means that in-person assistance is always available. Unlike some other private and public transport services, there is no need to book an accessible crossing in advance.

What are the unmet transport needs of people wanting to access areas on either side of Mercury Bay?

The ferry is a valuable service, appreciated by residents on both sides of the crossing. The only problem is that for some people, the cost is too great to meet all of their needs. There are two main groups of people that the community suggest have the greatest unmet need:

1. Disabled people
2. Older people including kaumatua

Both of these groups include people who can receive transport subsidies, where those transport services exist.

Many disabled people in Waikato Region (which includes Thames Coromandel District) are eligible for a subsidy for private taxi trips: Total Mobility. Qualifying people can access discounted private taxi fares, where there are taxis in their area that are part of the nationwide Total Mobility scheme. There is a taxi service in Mercury Bay (Whiti City Cabs) that is part of the Total Mobility Scheme.

There are two transport subsidies available in many parts of New Zealand, but not in Mercury Bay. First, Waikato Region offers an Accessibility concession for public transport. Qualifying people can access free public transport, defined as scheduled bus and train services in the region. There are no scheduled bus or train services in Mercury Bay. People living in this area can apply for a concession so that when they do use scheduled services (in Thames, or from Paeroa to Hamilton, for example). But the public transport concession does not help people access what they need in Mercury Bay.

The second subsidy is SuperGold. This provides free travel on public transport for people aged over 65 years, with no other qualifying criteria. As stated above, there are no public transport services in Mercury Bay, so while people who live in the region might have a SuperGold card, it does not help them to access transport in Mercury Bay.

Total Mobility in Mercury Bay

The operators of Whiti City Cabs have been part of the Total Mobility scheme since 2024 and have taxis on both sides of the bay. There are 87 people registered for Total Mobility who live in Mercury Bay (June 2025).

The numbers of Total Mobility trips overall, provided by Whiti City Cabs, are shown in Figure 2. Total hoist trips shows the trend in trips made by people who needed a wheelchair hoist to get into and out of a vehicle. A trip is defined as one-way, so anyone traveling from home to a destination, and back again later, would result in two trips.

The data in Figure 2 show an overall increasing trend in Total Mobility trips in Mercury Bay. This is to be expected because the service is new. As more people find out about Total Mobility being available in their area, the growth is likely to slow. However, Mercury Bay has an ageing resident population. Total Mobility eligibility is correlated positively with age, which means that growth in both people registered for the scheme, and trips, is to be expected.

Whiti City Cabs report that there is one regular Total Mobility customer who lives on the southern side. That person travels on occasion across the water to access services in Whitianga. They are required to pay separate, subsidised taxi fares on both sides, and a full adult fare on the ferry.

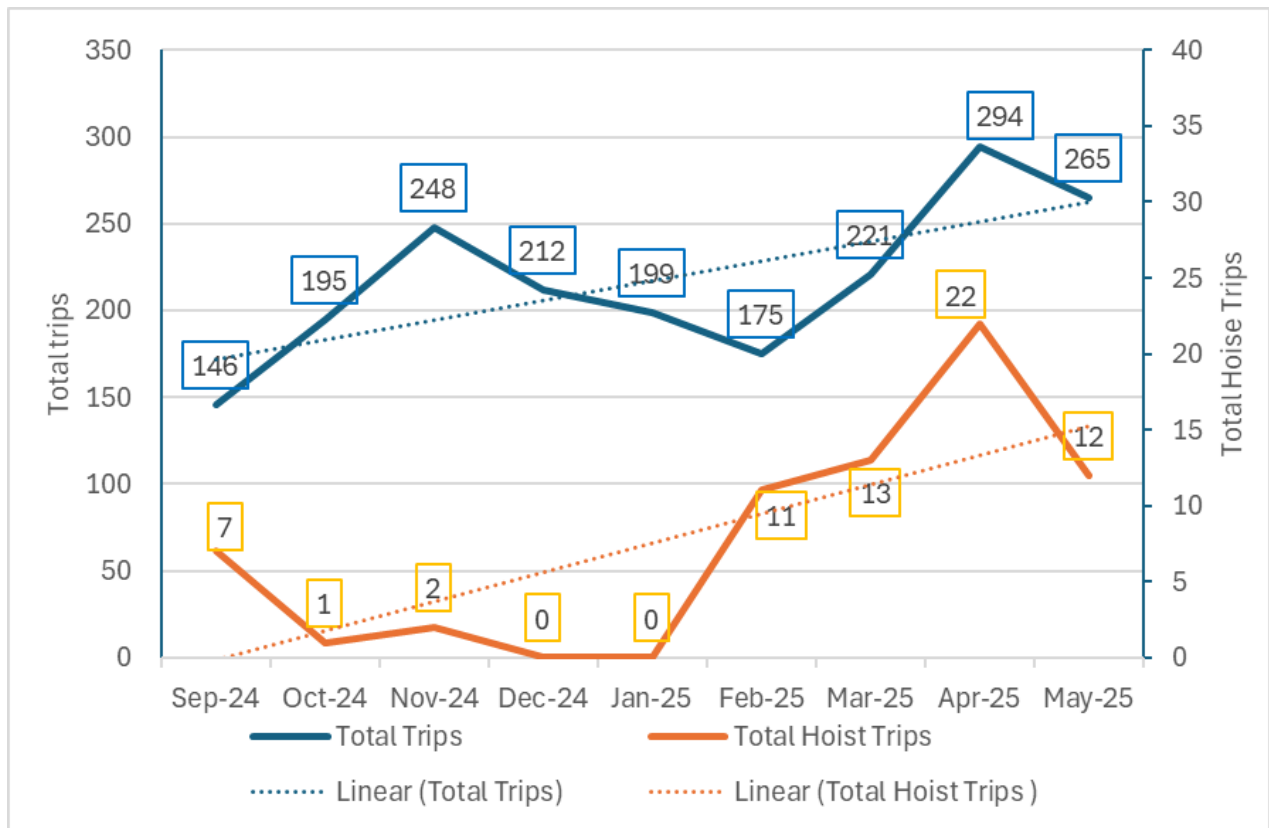


Figure 2 Total Mobility trips in Mercury Bay, September 2024 – May 2025 inclusive

Typical trips: a case study

A typical taxi fare within Mercury Bay costs \$12. With the current 75% Total Mobility subsidy, the cost to a passenger is \$3. For a trip to a supermarket or medical centre in Whitianga, the cost to someone who lives in Whitianga is markedly different from someone who lives south of the harbour.

The Whitianga-based passenger with Total Mobility would pay \$6 in total for the return journey, which is \$3 each way. A passenger south of the harbour would pay \$3 to get to the ferry, and to get from the wharf at Whitianga to the supermarket or medical centre, and the same on the way back. In addition they would pay the full return ferry fare of \$8 return. The total cost for this customer to visit a supermarket or medical centre – neither of which are available south of the harbour – is therefore \$20 for the return journey.

Question 2: Unmet transport needs crossing Mercury Bay and what to do about them

The most obvious recommended change to support access across Mercury Bay is for the ferry to become a Total Mobility provider. The subsidy would make an \$8 return trip into a \$2 trip, which would be a significant improvement for Total Mobility passengers. The ferry is privately operated, and there are precedents for ferries being included in New Zealand's Total Mobility scheme.

In terms of other concessions, for example Gold Card or Accessibility, it is not clear how they might be amended to be applicable for a private ferry. Both of these concessions rely on the definition of public transport: it includes only publicly subsidised and regionally governed bus and train services. There are no other wholly privately operated transport services in Waikato Region that offer public accessibility or Gold Card concessions. It would be possible for local community advocates to petition for changes so that these complex rules could be overcome, but that energy is not likely to result in any meaningful change in the short term. Therefore, ongoing effort to provide ferry subsidy for older people, or for any other group who do not qualify for Total Mobility, is not recommended as an immediate action.

Nonetheless, there are people living on both sides of the water who do not qualify for Total Mobility, but who struggle to afford transport to meet their everyday needs. Therefore, it is recommended that for the specific case of providing access across the water in Mercury Bay, that the Whitianga community is supported to apply for extra funding to supply discounted ferry tickets for local people. A special grant through the regional Community Transport Fund, on top of the funds applied for to support Community Transport in general in Mercury Bay, could be used for this purpose.

As an example, an additional \$15,000 would provide funding for approximately 2500 discounted ferry trips at the same discount rate as Total Mobility. It would make a return ferry trip \$2 for a passenger. These tickets could be distributed to community through an organisation such as Whitianga Community Services Trust. Tickets could then be reimbursed after they are collected by the ferry operator on-board. This unique, community-led solution would address the significant access disadvantage faced by people living on the southern side of Mercury Bay who need to access services in Whitianga. The administration through the Trust that already provides community transport means that a connected journey could be offered, at prices and koha that are reasonable and much more affordable for local people than the current situation.

If a grant for this purpose is provided, its use would need to be followed up with an accountability report, as is required for all funding through the regional Community Transport fund. Monitoring through community channels would identify the benefits

that the discounted ferry tickets are providing, as well as being another means to monitor ongoing unmet needs for access in and around Mercury Bay.

Broader access issues in Mercury Bay

The population of Mercury Bay is diverse, with growing challenges related to the cost of living in this area. Transport is a significant cost because many people live far away from services they need to access. Community concerns raised as part of this research included the following:

- Many kaumātua in the area struggle with the rising cost of living, and may choose to forego important trips because of a lack of affordable transport, with implications for loneliness, mental and physical health
- The social challenges contribute to worsening population health, which in turn increases pressure on medical services and aged residential care
- Driving long distances to access services locally and within the District, including to Thames, is difficult: geography can be challenging; storms result in closed roads and long detours, with increasing frequency; and there are road safety as well as logistical and affordability challenges for people to access what they need. People also express concern about the environmental impact of long trips by road.
- Travel from Mercury Bay into Thames is particularly problematic. Extreme examples include that some people are unwilling to travel to hospital in Thames, because they fear the prohibitive cost of the trip home when they are discharged.
- There appears to be an unwillingness from social service providers to come to Whitianga: there are no driver licencing practical tests offered in Mercury Bay, no Ministry of Social Development appointments, and no Justice system services such as courts.

All of these issues could be addressed with a combination of public transport and public service provision. If people could access what they needed in Mercury Bay, there would be a raft of benefits to the local economy, to health, education, employment, and to broader wellbeing.

The challenge in improving access in Mercury Bay lies in crossing government boundaries to clearly articulate benefits and costs. As it stands, public transport funding is very limited insofar as providing any new scheduled services. Recent national government policy supports growth in public transport only in the largest New Zealand cities.

Access in Mercury Bay: what more could be done?

Community transport, such as that provided by Whitianga Community Services Trust for medical trips, could be extended to provide more of the local trips that are currently difficult for many people to manage. However, these rely on a volunteer base that is itself stretched. More funding would help. Waikato Regional Council administers a contestable, regional fund for grants to support access in places like Mercury Bay. It may be that more collaboration between Trusts that do, or that could provide community transport could help to identify the next most pressing need for access, and to apply for regional funding towards meeting that need.

The role of Community Waikato as a broker and conduit between community and government is noted. Community Waikato has worked with community in Mercury Bay, and in the broader Coromandel area for a long time. Their support is central to identifying potential opportunities for collaboration, in supporting community groups to be sustainable and to thrive, and to provide links back to local government where interventions would be mutually beneficial.

In addressing the matter of services available in Whitianga, it would also be useful for all partners to collaborate in support of improved public service provision in Mercury Bay. The Whitianga Community Services Trust has premises that can be leased to government for all manner of public services, so a push for different providers to come together and show up in Whitianga could be warranted. As examples, local driver licencing (practical test), social services appointments through the Ministry of Social Development, and access to the justice system could all be promoted through cross-sector collaboration. While this is not a transport solution, it is clearly directed at improving local access. In that respect it would fall under regional policy governed by Waikato Regional Council in collaboration with local governance, including Thames Coromandel District and local Community Boards.

An example of local collaboration for social and community services is the Ministry of Social Development Heartland Services scheme. As explained on the Ministry website:

Heartlands supports rural and isolated communities access government and non-government services, as well as advice, support, and access to free technology. Heartlands also provides a physical space/hub so people can access services face to face.

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/community/rural-communities/improving-support-for-people-in-rural-communities.html>

It would appear that Whitianga would be a suitable location for a Heartland Services collaboration. Collaborations such as those recommended could help to identify other opportunities for access improvements. More local investment by a range of

government departments could yield more than the sum of its parts: by providing places for people to access what they need, people can find out about other challenges and opportunities, and potentially work together, as community, to strengthen and grow.

Summary of recommendations

In answer to the questions posed at the start of this report, it is recommended that

4. Support the Whitianga Ferry to become a Total Mobility provider: collaboration between Waikato Regional Council and Whitianga Ferry
5. Support access across the harbour with a special Waikato Regional Council grant for discounted ferry trips, to be administered by a local community provider in collaboration with community, including with Whitianga Ferry
6. Investigate and support ways for public services to return to Mercury Bay: Collaboration between Waikato Regional Council, Thames Coromandel District Council, local community representatives including Community Waikato, Ministry of Social Development, NZ Transport Agency (driver licencing), Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Social Development's Heartland Services scheme would appear to be a good candidate to address some access challenges in Mercury Bay.

The more evidence is found, the more likely it is that ongoing investment in public and community transport, as well as Total Mobility, will demonstrably meet local needs for access. With current policy settings favouring higher frequency bus and train services in growing cities, more and more people living in remote and rural areas are going without, and we do not know the extent of that unmet need unless we talk with them.

Beyond these actions, it is recommended that Waikato Regional Council extends this work to explore unmet needs for access across the region as a whole. As a minimum, collaboration between local government and the Ministry of Social Development would be useful, to promote and expand the Heartland Services scheme to more communities in the region.

Appendix: Letters of support



29 June 2025

Tony Masters

General Manager

Whitianga Community Services Trust.

RE: Ferry Subsidies and the Waikato Regional Council.

Good morning, Tony,

In regards the effectiveness of the Total Mobility scheme this is our experience on the Whitianga side. Whiti City Cabs has had Total Mobility for approximately 12 months. In that time, we have seen an increase of older/mobility impaired people make use of the discounts on offer. Many of the people are coming out more often into the community, and not just for supermarket, medical, but recreational purposes which is the essence of the scheme. Even though the numbers currently are small coming off the ferry, the passengers do appreciate that we can get them to, say, the Mercury Bay Medical Centre which is \$12.00 at normal fare or \$3.75 under the Total Mobility Scheme.

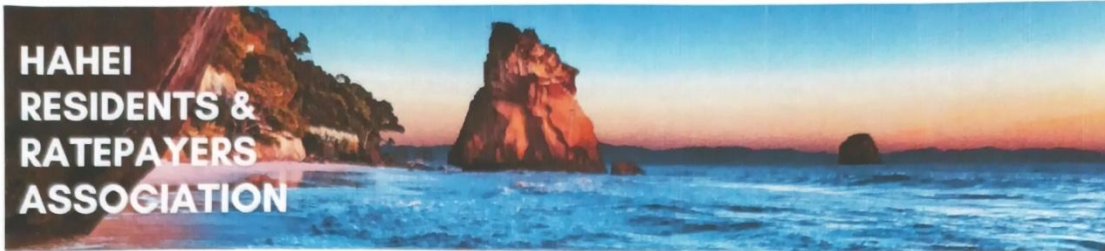
It would be a sensible extension for Total Mobility scheme to include Whitianga Ferry and Steve Rush from Be Driven, so they could offer Total Mobility as part of the service. This would mean a Total Mobility card holder can enjoy time on either side of the estuary and enjoy the facilities that are available.

In essence, getting people back into the community.

Regards

Michelle and Phil Butler

Whiti City Cabs



19 June 2025

To whom it may concern.

I am writing on behalf of the Hahei Residents & Ratepayers Association in support for subsidies for seniors for the local ferry.

The Whitianga Ferry is a critical transport link between Mercury Bay South and Whitianga. A typical journey from the Mercury Bay South settlements to Whitianga can take up to 35 to 40 minutes by car depending on traffic. A ferry trip is half this time and there are considerable fuel savings and environmental advantages as well.

Mercury Bay South residents rely on travel to Whitianga for economic, medical and other services, shopping and social activities.

With the current cost of living and transport assistance by way of a subsidy would be hugely beneficial to our elderly community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Jonassen'.

John Jonassen

Chair, Hahei Residents & Ratepayers Association

Telephone 021 610 021



23 June 2025

To whom it may concern,

LETTER OF SUPPORT – FARE SUBSIDIES FOR KAUMĀTUA | FERRY SERVICE, WHITIANGA

Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki, as active advocates for the implementation of fare subsidies for kaumātua who rely on the ferry service between Ferry Landing and Whitianga, support the proposal for Government researchers and relevant transport authorities to explore the feasibility of extending public fare subsidies – such as those provided through the Super Gold Card or similar initiatives – to cover the Ferry Landing to Whitianga route.

We base this position of active support and advocacy on the following:

➤ Importance of the Whitianga Ferry Route

The Ferry Landing Whitianga is not merely a convenience – it is a lifeline. This route represents more than a transit service; it provides a critical connection to independence, dignity, and wellbeing.

For kaumātua, particularly those without access to private transportation, it is often the only practical means of accessing:

- Essential services, including medical and community health services, pharmacies, and banks
- Supermarkets and other retailers not available on the Ferry Landing side
- Community centres, social groups, and places of worship
- Opportunities for recreation, reducing social isolation and loneliness

➤ Current challenges faced by Kaumātua of

Many of our kaumātua are on fixed incomes and are struggling with the rising cost of living, particularly in food, housing and health care. Transportation costs – however modest they may appear to some – bears a genuine financial barrier to others. Some of these common difficulties include:

- Affordability: Even a modest fare can be prohibitive for kaumātua (pensioners) who must carefully manage their limited weekly budgets.
- Social Isolation: Without affordable transport, some kaumātua remain at home for extended periods, leading to loneliness, depression, and deteriorating mental and physical health.
- Accessibility: While the ferry is more convenient than longer land-based alternatives, the lack of subsidised fares may push kaumātua toward riskier or less accessible means of transportation – or worse, causing them to forgo important travel altogether.
- Equity: Many kaumātua (senior citizens) in urban areas benefit from subsidised or free public transport through schemes like the Super Gold Card. Consideration of similar subsidy scheme approaches, for rural communities such as ours, is a vital step to avoiding further wellbeing inequities.

➤ The Case for Subsidies

Introducing fare subsidies for kaumātua would align with the Government's broader goals of supporting aging in place, promoting accessibility, and ensuring equitable access to public services

across all regions. Furthermore, the social return on investment in this subsidy is considerable:

- Improved health outcomes through better access to medical services
- Reduced pressure on social and aged-care services through increased community engagement
- Enhanced quality of life and reduced mental health burdens among older populations
- Greater local economic activity as seniors can more readily shop, socialise, and contribute to the community

This short but essential journey plays a significant role in the daily lives of many kaumātua (elderly/senior residents) within our hāpori (community) and therefore making it more accessible through subsidised fares would offer wide-reaching social and economic benefits. This would be a small step in financial terms, but a giant leap for the wellbeing of our rural based kaumātua and their ability to undertake normal day-to-day activities.

Your immediate consideration of this urgent and meaningful matter would be greatly appreciated.

Noho ora mai rā,

Janine Thompson

POUKURA HAUORA (CLINICAL SERVICES MANAGER)

Waea: +64 027 210 8821

Imēra: janine.thompson@korowai.co.nz



Te Korowai Hauora o Hauraki is a rural, Iwi-based, not-for-profit, incorporated society that provides affordable health and wellbeing services across the Hauraki rohe and to the people of Hauraki, since 1994.



Mercury Bay Cancer Support Trust
5 Blacksmith Lane
Whitianga

18th June 2025

Whitianga Community Services Trust
Social Services Centre
PO Box 109
Whitianga 3542

Kia Ora Tony

Re: Ferry Subsidies for the Elderly

The Mercury Bay Cancer Support Trust is happy to support the business case for reduced fares for this demographic. We regularly have, clients living in the Flaxmill Bay/Cooks Beach area that must make frequent trips to Whitianga for medical care, diagnostics, prescriptions and other therapeutic supports. The cost of being unwell comes as both actual additional costs to access the care they need but also in lost potential earnings due to ill health and so there is often financial pressure associated with cancer. Any saving will help for these clients, elsewhere in the country they would benefit from free off-peak transport, our clients are somewhat disadvantaged due to their geographic location.

Thank you for this initiative and we hope reason wins the day and the submission successful.

Ngā mihi nui
Di Taylor
Social Worker and Service Coordinator
Mercury Bay Cancer Support Trust
Phone 027 252 7996
mercurybaycst@gmail.com



19th June 2025

To whom it may concern

Re: Submission for Subsidised Ferry Fares for Elderly Residents of Mercury Bay South

My name is Maureen Kerr, and I am a member of the Mercury Bay Community Trust (MBCST), which funds initiatives such as Manawa Kai (formerly Monday Meals) and Mercury Bay Day Camp. On behalf of the Trust, I wish to advocate for the implementation of subsidised ferry fares for elderly residents between Whitianga and Mercury Bay South.

Currently, our organisation oversees Manawa Kai Meals in Whitianga, serving approximately 180-200 people every Monday. However, we have observed that seniors from Mercury Bay South do not participate due to the high cost of travel. While we sometimes cover ferry costs ourselves when the need is urgent, this is not a sustainable solution.

The lack of affordable transportation creates a significant disparity: elderly residents living on the opposite side of the estuary are unable to access nutritious meals and essential services. The ferry service, which is unsubsidised, limits Gold Card holders from enjoying the same benefits as other New Zealanders in urban areas. For example, Gold Card holders can travel freely to Auckland and Waiheke Island during certain times, with ferry fares to Waiheke costing \$44 return. In contrast, ferry trips within Mercury Bay are quick—less than 2 minutes—yet the round trip by car takes approximately 50 minutes and incurs high petrol costs.

As seniors age and are no longer able to drive, they rely solely on the ferry service, often needing taxis to access supermarkets or medical facilities. This situation imposes unnecessary financial and logistical burdens on our elderly community members.

We believe that providing subsidies for ferry fares would promote social interaction, mental health, and overall wellbeing among senior residents. Many councils across New Zealand actively encourage senior travel through subsidies, often requiring proof of residency—an approach that could be adapted for Mercury Bay residents.

We urge local authorities and policymakers to consider implementing subsidised ferry fares for Mercury Bay South's elderly residents, ensuring equitable access to essential services and social opportunities. Such measures would align with broader national efforts to support senior wellbeing and reduce transportation inequalities in our community.

Yours faithfully

Maureen Kerr
Mercury Bay Community Support Trust
M 027 246 6164



Age Concern Hauraki Coromandel
200 Mary Street
Thames.
18 June 2025

Dear Sirs,

We at Age Concern Hauraki Coromandel see evidence everyday of older people struggling financially, and experiencing difficulties with transport in our vast geographically challenging environment.

Our roads are hilly, windy and a lot still metal, and when our people age, they tend to drive closer and closer to home due to their lack of confidence on our 'Coromandel' roads. This creates problems when they have to get buy groceries and attend medical and other appointments in the main towns and cities. To travel a short distance as the crow flies, on land becomes a long windy road.

In Thames we offer the Total Mobility card for the people in our communities that can't drive and rely on taxis to get around.

We believe those in all regions should get access to a heavily discounted transport scheme if they are unable to drive anymore.

We would appreciate your thoughts and discussion on this matter and allow this to happen please.

Yours faithfully,

Jo Sanderson

Team Leader

Age Concern Hauraki Coromandel.



83 Joan Gaskell Drive, Whitianga, 3510
T: +64 7 866 5911 F: +64 7 866 2180
E: contactus@mbmc.co.nz
www.mbmc.co.nz
'Providing remote rural primary care'

23 June 2025

To whom it may concern

Re: In support of proposal by Social Services Whitianga for Ferry Subsidies

We know we have an aging demographic. Of our 7400 patients, 34% are 65 years and over.

With aging, a higher risk of cognitive decline presents, particularly dementia and unfortunately, we are seeing an increase of these diagnosis.

While some changes are a normal part of aging, dementia affects significant decline in cognitive abilities that impairs daily functioning and in some cases the loss of ability to drive.

Our patients are experiencing the impacts of this on their Health and Wellbeing. Being able to have access to supports and services are paramount in maintaining decline further. We are currently rolling out a Health Passport / Green Prescription to support preventative measure of frailty which in turn will help decrease cognitive decline. Included are gym membership Whitianga walkers, Elevate – senior rehabilitation classes, Age Concern Steady as you Go. Senior mindfulness and movement therapy among others.

However, for our community living over the river access and cost poses limited participation. In turn affecting their right, equity, fairness, and autonomy to promote the enhancement of their health and social change.

We align to TCDC's implementation of their Positive Aging strategy to address opportunities and changes for our older demographic to ensure a society that encourages health and full participation.

Therefore, we are (and for some time have been) in total support of Social Services proposal for a concession / subsidy for seniors and the disabled to secure travel on the Whitianga ferry to maintain health, wellbeing and connectedness to our patient's wider community.

Mauri Ora
Sincerely

Directors and Team at Mercury Bay Medical Centre

This report has been prepared by Bridget Doran for Waikato Regional Council. For more information please contact the author.

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