

Submission on the Proposed Sunday Paid Parking Zone
From the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA)

Tēnā koutou,

This submission is made on behalf of the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA), the elected student body representing over 20,000 learners enrolled at the University of Otago. Our members include both domestic and international students, undergraduate and postgraduate, part-time and full-time, many of whom live in the central city, surrounding suburbs, or further afield. Our student population is diverse in background and circumstance, but overwhelmingly made up of young people on low to modest incomes who are highly dependent on public services and affordable access to the city centre.

We are responding to the Dunedin City Council's consultation on the proposed implementation zone for paid parking on Sundays. While we acknowledge that the broader policy to introduce Sunday parking charges has already been decided through the 9-Year Plan process, this consultation remains a vital opportunity to raise concerns, propose mitigations, and ensure that the policy's implementation does not result in disproportionate or unjust outcomes for some of our city's most financially vulnerable residents.

OUSA supports the vision of a more sustainable, pedestrian-friendly, and climate-conscious city. We understand that Council's objectives include reducing car dependence, encouraging turnover in the city centre, and aligning with wider urban development and transport strategies. However, we believe that equity and accessibility must be treated as foundational principles, not afterthoughts. Our support for sustainable change is firm, but it is conditional on that change being fair. Unfortunately, we are concerned that this policy, in its current form and without further modification, may disproportionately impact students, part-time workers, people with disabilities, and low-income residents. These groups often lack access to viable alternatives and may end up bearing the costs of a system that was not designed with their realities in mind.

For many students, Sunday is not simply a day of leisure. It is a critical window in which they catch up on assignments, attend group meetings, access university and public library spaces, attend religious services, or take on additional work shifts in the hospitality or retail sectors. Many of these services and commitments are located in or around the city centre. In recent years, Sundays have become one of the few remaining opportunities for students to engage with the city in an affordable way, particularly those who live further from campus or in suburbs with poor public transport access. The removal of free parking during this day and time threatens to undermine this fragile accessibility.

Although the fee for Sunday parking may seem minor when looked at in isolation, the cumulative cost is anything but negligible for students living on weekly incomes of around 300 dollars. That amount is typically what students receive through the student loan living cost payments or, for those who qualify, the student allowance. After rent is paid, which can range from 180 to over 250 dollars per week depending on location, students are left with very limited funds to cover food, transport, electricity, healthcare, and other essentials. A parking fee of even three or four dollars per hour on a Sunday can make a real difference in whether a student chooses to attend campus, participate in community activities, or isolate themselves at home to avoid costs. While this level of expense might be easily absorbed by salaried professionals or

those living within walking distance of the city, it is not fair to assume that all city users are in a position to pay these charges without consequence.

It is also important to consider that students often work weekends, including Sundays, to fit their employment around academic schedules. These jobs are typically in the service industry, including hospitality, retail, and care work, where wages are low and hours can be unpredictable. For many of these students, driving is not a preference but a necessity, especially when returning home late at night or commuting from areas poorly served by buses. By introducing paid parking on Sundays, Council risks imposing yet another burden on essential workers and low-paid staff who already face significant challenges just getting to and from work.

Furthermore, the public transport network on Sundays does not meet the needs of the student community. While Council and regional authorities have made some efforts to improve services, many of the routes that connect suburbs like North East Valley, Pine Hill, Brockville, Concord, and South Dunedin operate at very limited frequencies, often with gaps of an hour or more between services. For students who have no other means of transport and live beyond walking distance, this creates a situation where their only reliable option is a private vehicle. Until the public transport system is significantly improved to provide regular, accessible, and safe service seven days a week, it is inappropriate to financially penalise people for driving into the city on a Sunday.

The notion that Sunday paid parking will help achieve transport mode shift is flawed if that shift cannot be equitably supported. Real mode shift requires investment in safe cycling infrastructure, accessible walkways, and dependable public transport. It cannot be driven solely through financial disincentives that punish people without providing them alternatives. If parking policy is implemented before the necessary infrastructure is in place, the outcome is not a just transition but an unfair burden placed on those least able to adapt.

Another major concern is the potential effect this policy will have on access to civic, community, and religious spaces. Many churches, marae, cultural centres, and community organisations are located within or near the proposed Sunday parking enforcement zone. These institutions serve as critical gathering spaces, especially on Sundays, for worship, community meals, language and cultural classes, support groups, and volunteer coordination. These activities contribute significantly to the social wellbeing of the city and are often attended by people of all ages, including young families, elderly residents, and students. Many of these individuals travel into the city specifically on Sundays because that is when these services are offered, and because weekday obligations make it difficult to participate at other times.

The introduction of paid parking during the hours when most religious and community events are held risks discouraging attendance, disrupting community routines, and undermining the accessibility of these spaces. For many who attend, walking or biking may not be realistic due to age, disability, or distance. Public transport is also unreliable or unavailable for some parts of the city on Sunday mornings. If the cost of parking becomes a barrier to attending religious or cultural gatherings, the result will be increased isolation, reduced participation, and a central city that is no longer seen as a shared, inclusive civic space.

OUSA strongly recommends that Council consider time-based exemptions for areas surrounding key community and religious venues. For example, Sunday morning exemptions between 9am and 12pm near churches and temples could preserve the ability of community members to attend services without penalty. This approach would strike a balance between

achieving policy goals and protecting the ability of diverse groups to access the city for civic and cultural purposes.

We are also concerned about the assumption that flat-rate parking fees represent a neutral or objective way to manage space. Uniform pricing models often ignore the significant differences in ability to pay. For someone with disposable income and flexible work arrangements, paying for parking is a minor inconvenience. For a student or low-wage worker, it can be the difference between participating or not. Without specific safeguards or mitigation strategies, this policy will reinforce rather than reduce social inequities in how public space is accessed.

In short, fairness must be an integral part of how we design transport and urban planning policies. It is not enough to focus on efficiency or turnover. We must also ask who is being turned over, and who is being turned away.

To ensure the implementation of Sunday paid parking reflects the values of fairness, accessibility, and sustainability, OUSA proposes the following actions and amendments:

First, we urge Council to introduce discounted or exempt parking permits for students and other low-income residents who need to access the central city on Sundays. These permits could be available on application through a verified process that includes student ID or Community Services Card eligibility. This would ensure that the most affected groups are not unfairly penalised while still allowing Council to meet its broader objectives.

Second, we recommend identifying and exempting certain areas near critical institutions, including the University of Otago Library, Dunedin Public Library, campus mental health services, and known places of worship. These spaces are used by students for academic, spiritual, and personal support, and their accessibility on weekends is vital. Paid parking should not serve as a deterrent to education or wellbeing.

Third, we recommend pausing or reducing enforcement hours in specific locations during commonly attended Sunday events or service times. For example, Council could delay paid parking until midday in areas near religious venues, or apply a flat reduced rate in those zones. This would minimise disruption to community gatherings while still encouraging turnover in other high-demand retail spaces.

Fourth, we encourage Council to commit to transparency and accountability by collecting and publishing data on the impact of the Sunday parking policy. This data should include parking occupancy rates, demographic impacts, shifts in transport behaviour, and any evidence of reduced access to essential services. Only by reviewing and responding to this evidence can the Council ensure that the policy remains just and effective.

Fifth, we recommend that revenue collected from Sunday parking be ring-fenced and reinvested in public transport improvements and active transport infrastructure. This could include increased frequency of Sunday buses, improved bus shelter lighting and accessibility, cycle safety measures, or pedestrian upgrades. If paid parking is genuinely intended to support a mode shift, then the revenue must be used to fund that shift, particularly in ways that support those with the least ability to pay.

Finally, we suggest that Council consider delaying or scaling back the scope of the Sunday enforcement zone until a meaningful threshold of public transport accessibility and community support has been reached. Implementing a policy that may be harmful in the short term with the hope of correcting it later risks damaging trust and undermining public buy-in.

In conclusion, OUSA supports the goals of climate resilience, accessible public spaces, and smart city design. However, we believe those goals cannot be achieved through pricing policies alone. Without investment in alternatives, without equity mechanisms, and without meaningful consultation with affected communities, paid parking risks becoming a barrier instead of a bridge. We urge the Council to use this implementation phase to mitigate those risks and to demonstrate a commitment to shared urban wellbeing.

Our student community is proud to call Ōtepoti home. We want to be part of shaping a city that works for all its residents, not just those with disposable income or inner-city privilege. We hope that this submission is received in that spirit and welcome any opportunity to engage further in partnership with Council.

Ngā mihi,
Otago University Students' Association