

27 September 2022

Committee Secretariat  
Transport and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

By email [ti@parliament.govt.nz](mailto:ti@parliament.govt.nz)

Tēnā koutou

**Dunedin City Council Submission: Inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand**

- 1 The Dunedin City Council (DCC) appreciates the opportunity to submit on the inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand.

**Background**

- 2 The DCC has an integrated Transport Strategy with a vision of Dunedin is one of the world's great small cities, with a safe low-carbon transport system that supports a compact city with resilient centres, inclusive and healthy communities, and national and international connectivity.
- 3 In 2019 the DCC committed to a goal of being net carbon zero by 2030. Reducing Transport emissions is key to achieving this aim, as they are the largest and fastest growing emission category.
- 4 The DCC, through its holding company Dunedin City Holdings Limited, is the owner of Dunedin Railways Limited, which is a tourism train operation on the branch line to Middlemarch from Dunedin Railway station.
- 5 The DCC submits there is an opportunity for greater use of rail in and around Dunedin. There has been continuous under-investment in the Dunedin and greater Otago-Southland rail network, which has resulted in constraints leading to under-utilisation.
- 6 Recent work on domestic transport costs and charges undertaken by the Ministry of Transport shows the current rail network is the lowest emission mode per passenger kilometre (other than walking or cycling) and per net tonne kilometre for freight.

## **Submission**

- 7 The DCC submits that the New Zealand Rail Plan and Rail Network Investment Programme has limited ambition to improve rail outside of the 'golden triangle' and lower north island, with a focus in the Southland and Otago regions on maintaining the existing (low) level of service. Improvements to the level of service could release demand for additional freight movements and inter-regional passenger transport.
- 8 If New Zealand wants to achieve its carbon zero goals rail needs to play a much bigger role in our transport system, and greater ambition is needed to drive improvements to rail in the South Island.
- 9 The DCC submits that the Government:
  - a) Update the New Zealand Rail Plan and Rail Network Investment Programme to reflect a more ambitious strategy to make improvements to the Main South Line (MSL) in the Otago and Southland Regions, re-introduce passenger rail on the MSL and add a passing loop between Mosgiel and Caversham.
  - b) Provide investment to undertake further investigation into the re-introduction of passenger rail services within Dunedin and the wider region.

### ***The Government should further investigate inter-regional passenger rail between Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill***

- 10 The DCC submits in support of resuming inter-regional passenger services between Dunedin and Invercargill, and Dunedin and Christchurch. These services would provide a lower carbon alternative for longer distance trips.
- 11 Rail connects Dunedin to Christchurch and Invercargill via the MSL railway line. The historic Dunedin railway station is well placed to serve the Central Business District (CBD) for passenger rail services, with lines connecting to Mosgiel and further to the south, and the coastal communities to the north.
- 12 The DCC notes it may be difficult to currently justify a regular scheduled service due to slow travel times. Investment in the MSL is required to improve journey times so that inter-city rail can be time competitive with other transport modes. Running longer distance trains to large events, like major concerts at Forsyth Barr Stadium, could have safety and environmental benefits.
- 13 Improvements to the MSL to support increased freight movements should be considered by the Government as enabling for inter-regional passenger services along the MSL in the Otago and Southland Regions. DCC submits that the Government should update the New Zealand Rail Plan and Rail Network Investment Programme to reflect the importance of improvements the MSL.

### ***Passenger rail between Mosgiel and Dunedin***

- 14 The DCC acknowledges the need for a stronger evidence base and requests the development of a business case for the reestablishment of passenger rail between Mosgiel and Dunedin and the wider region. The DCC requests the business case includes a trial of sufficient length to demonstrate the feasibility of a Mosgiel-Dunedin commuter service.

- 15 During the engagement of the DCC 2021-2031 ten-year plan, support was expressed by the public for passenger rail services between Mosgiel and the CBD. Dunedin has a high concentration of employment in the CBD and Mosgiel/Taieri is a major growth area.
- 16 Existing public transport services between Mosgiel and the Dunedin CBD are at capacity during peak periods and most commuters choose to drive causing heavy demand on the Southern Motorway. The DCC explored running a trial service using Dunedin Railways rolling stock but was unable for a number of reasons including operational constraints on the MSL and that Local Authorities could not operate public transport services.

***Rail Passing Loop is a priority to reduce a bottleneck on the MSL***

- 17 Currently around 70% of freight arriving at Port Otago, a major deep water export Port, is carried by rail. Approximately 270 million net tonnes of freight are carried on rail within Otago per annum, avoiding the need for over 70,000 truck movements and saving around 16,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.
- 18 One section of the MSL between Fonterra Mosgiel at Wingatui and Port Otago is experiencing constraints during peak dairy production. This constrained section of the MSL is currently a barrier to the introduction of commuter rail.
- 19 The removal of the double track between Caversham-Mosgiel section of the MSL has led to these capacity constraints for freight, which has ruled out capacity for commuter rail services. The DCC submits that the government considers investing in the addition of a rail passing loop to the MSL between Mosgiel and Caversham as a priority.
- 20 The Otago-Southland Regional Land Transport Plan included a rail passing loop project to address this capacity constraint on the MSL, but it was not included in the national land transport programme as it was not included in the Rail Network Investment Programme.
- 21 The ability to service additional freight to Port Otago, especially logs, is hampered by the absence of a mode transfers facility such as an inland port. The DCC supports continued investigation of the feasibility of an Inland Port at Milburn.

**Concluding remarks**

- 22 The DCC thanks you for the ability to submit on the inquiry into the future of inter-regional passenger rail in New Zealand.
- 23 The DCC would like to speak to our submission.

Kā mihi



Aaron Hawkins  
**MAYOR OF DUNEDIN**