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Wellington Regional Council	
18 MAY 2006	

16 May 2006

Mr Anthony Cross
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Greater Wellington Regional Council
PO Box 11 646
Wellington

FILE REF	
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Doc. No. SA7854	
Referred to	Date/Int
ACross	

Dear Mr Cross

Fares review

I refer to your telephone conversation with Senior Analyst Geoff Vogel on 15 May 2006.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed fare reviews. The Commission is very concerned about the proposal to phase out discount fares for beneficiaries aged between 18 and 65 years travelling by Stagecoach buses in the Wellington City area and comments as follows:

Cost

The Wellington Mental Health Consumers' Union informed the Human Rights Commission Transport Inquiry in that "cost is a major factor in determining whether mental health consumers/tangata whaiora are able to use [scheduled] public transport." The Inquiry reported that "the cost of transport is a key component that must be factored into any *serious* effort to improve participation of disabled people in education, employment and the wider community (emphasis added)."

The emphasis by consumers about the cost of scheduled public transport is not surprising. At the end of March 2006, 27.2% of 74,401 people in New Zealand of working age receiving Invalids Benefit had psychological or psychiatric conditions. 33.6% of those receiving Invalids Benefit in the Wellington region (as per Ministry of Social Development boundary) have psychological or psychiatric conditions.

At the end of the same period, 35.2% of 46,072 people of working age receiving Sickness Benefit had psychological or psychiatric conditions. 37.7% of those receiving Sickness Benefit in the Wellington region have psychological or psychiatric conditions.

Those with psychological or psychiatric conditions are proportionally the largest group on Invalids and Sickness Benefits. The Commission expects this situation to remain for some time in light of the complexity of providing

Those with psychological or psychiatric conditions are proportionally the largest group on Invalids and Sickness Benefits. The Commission expects this situation to remain for some time in light of the complexity of providing sustainable employment opportunities for those people with disabilities receiving benefits (which includes removing unfair barriers to employment opportunities).

The above percentages indicate the significant number of people with experience of mental illness in the Wellington City area who may be affected if the current discount fares are phased out.

The Commission acknowledges that there may be inconsistencies in available funding in the Wellington Region to assist those who find the cost of public transport difficult. However, the Commission wishes to emphasise that people with experience of mental illness must be able to afford travel to (at the very least) their mental health appointments (which some are required to attend under the Mental Health Act). There is a risk that these attendances will be compromised if the discount fares for beneficiaries in Wellington are phased out leading to potentially poorer health outcomes. The Commission's concern is particularly acute as the amount of funding available to individuals for transport costs from the Ministry of Social Development will not be clear until the proposed benefit reforms are completed.

Discussion

You are welcome to discuss the above with me on DDI 474 8912.

Yours sincerely



Ruth Harrison
Chair Commissioner