SUBMISSION

Age Concern New Zealand
He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa

Submission to the Transport and Industrial Relations Select Committee
on the “Inquiry into the future of New Zealand's mobility"

April 2016

This submission has been developed in consultation with Age Concerns and their members.
1. **Background**

Age Concern is a charitable organisation working for older people in New Zealand. Our vision is for older people to live a valued life in an inclusive society. It is our mission to promote wellbeing, rights, respect and dignity for older people. We are active and vocal on relevant issues and work to assist older people to stay connected with their family, friends and community.

Age Concern interacts with over 7,650 older people every week through our national office (“Age Concern New Zealand”), 33 local Age Concerns (“Age Concerns”) and two affiliated services. We have over 4,500 volunteers who gift around 5,000 hours of their time per week. Our total volunteer hours across all services equates to a fiscal sum of $3.7 million per year based on minimum wage. We also have over 150 paid staff throughout New Zealand who work almost 4,000 hours per week, and 34 Boards to provide governance for all Age Concerns and Age Concern New Zealand.

Age Concern New Zealand is one of many social service providers reliant on funding from government agencies, specifically, but not limited to, providing elder abuse and neglect prevention services, services to enhance social connectivity for older people and services to provide health promotion programmes. Age Concerns are also funded through philanthropic trust grants, contributions from clients to their services and individual donations.

Demand for our support and services has grown significantly over the years, mirroring the growth in the older population, increasing longevity and the Government’s “positive ageing” and “ageing in place” strategies. Funding services to a growing group of older people is increasingly challenging. To continue to be effective and to be able to successfully meet the needs of New Zealand’s growing ageing population, funding needs to be: **adequate** – reflecting current and future demographic changes, supporting more people to age in place; **flexible** – enabling new services to be developed to reflect the needs of an ageing population; and **reliable** – enabling service providers to plan with confidence and effectiveness.

2. **Services**

Age Concern New Zealand is New Zealand’s lead organisation providing services to abused older people as well as education about elder abuse and neglect. Our Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention services aim to keep older New Zealanders free from abuse and neglect.

Age Concern New Zealand runs approximately 43 health promotion programmes that focus on empowering older people to have better health outcomes, assisting older people to remain independent and to age in place, ensuring older people are socially connected and ensuring older people feel valued and respected.

Age Concern New Zealand is also New Zealand’s primary organisation dedicated to delivery services to reduce loneliness and is often the first port of call for older people in their communities, offering support, expertise and services dependant on local needs. These local services enable older people to live healthy, independent, socially connected, safe and respected lives.
You will see here on this list above that many of our Age Concerns offer services that can help to increase mobility for older people, including transport, day trips, confident driving classes, provision of total mobility vouchers as well as falls prevention classes, exercise groups, coffee and lunch groups and more.

3. **Context of growing older in New Zealand**

The number of people aged 65 and over (65+) has doubled since 1980, and is likely to double again by 2036. The largest growth will occur between 2011 and 2036, as the baby boomers (those born from 1946 to 1965) move into the 65+ age group. The
proportion of the population aged 65+ (14 percent in 2012) will increase to 23 percent in 2036 and 26 percent in 2061.

As the number of older people in New Zealand grows, it becomes more and more important that we address any issues of mobility. We want our older population to be able to live well and age well, by being socially connected and involved in their communities. Not only does improved mobility mean improved wellbeing for older people, but by addressing any issues and challenges of mobility we are ensuring that older people can be a valued part of our society – able to volunteer, work part time, pick grandchildren up from school, and contribute to the economy for example, by catching the bus downtown to do some shopping, or for volunteering.

As you can see from the above chart, our regions are ageing faster than many of our cities. This means we need to put plans in place now – so that our regions are prepared for a much larger older population. This means working now to make our cities “age-friendly” which can address issues of mobility.

Currently, Kapiti and Thames are the only districts where more than 1:4 of the population is over 65. By 2033 two out of three districts in New Zealand will have more than 1:4 over 65.

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1 Statistics New Zealand.
2 Office for Seniors, Ministry of Social Development.
4. **What does mobility mean for older people?**

It can be said that addressing issues of mobility can lead to increased wellbeing, health, happiness and social connection for older people. If an older person is immobile, they are more at risk of becoming socially isolated – which has been proven to be as big a health risk as smoking.

Age Concern believes there are three aspects to mobility for older people.

“I am 50% blind and 60% deaf – I have been given a footpath scooter, which is fine for to and from the food-store. There is a weekday bus just around the corner so I arrange to travel anytime from 9-3 for free. I have a pack of taxi chits for anything needed at weekends or night time as the bus is useless on Saturday and non-existent on Sunday. The weekends are quite desolate for me.”

Gerald, 83.

5. **Physical accessibility.** Examples include age-friendly cities, wide and even footpaths, plenty of crossings, benches to take a break and public toilets can all help an older person to be more mobile in their community.
By making more cities “age-friendly” we can get more older people out and about in their communities. This could mean creating wider, more even footpaths so an older person can get around safely with their walker or wheelchair. It might mean adding more benches so that older people, who might be taking a walk to the shops, can take a rest and catch their breath. It could mean more public toilets, so that older people are not stuck in an emergency. More crossings and infrastructure for public transport is also important – as well as the grouping of key services, e.g. pharmacy, library, post office and bank all close together to make trips easier for older people. Obviously this requires some serious future planning – but with an ageing population, it needs to be considered now.

By making more places “age-friendly” older people will be able to get out to their local pool for an aqua aerobics class, to the library to socialise and learn, to their local Age Concern for a meal or to their relatives for a cup of tea, all of which can help to “add life to years” and improve the quality of life for older people.

6. **Personal mobility.** Examples include personal mobility means increased wellbeing, health and social connection. Strength and balance, exercise, confidence, social connection, and a sense of **feeling involved** and included can all help an older person to be more mobile in their community.

Personal mobility is another key factor in older people remaining mobile within their communities. For example, falls are a major public health issue for older people – and can lead to both health issues and a lack of confidence in walking and getting around. Age Concerns provides Steady As You Go®, a health promotion programme that helps older people to gain strength and balance – and ultimately prevent falls.

While we may get caught up in the idea of physical mobility, it is also important to consider personal mobility. An older person who exercises frequently is more able to navigate the footpath to the closest bus stop and so on. However, it’s not just strength, balance and exercise, it is also important for older people to have a sense of being included and valued in order for them to become more mobile in their communities. With all the strength, balance, free transport and wide footpaths in the world, what does it
matter, if you have no one to visit, nowhere to go and don't feel welcome in your community? Value, inclusion and social connection are hugely important factors in mobility for older people.

7. Accessible services. Examples include affordable, regular, easy public transport, Age Concern minibuses, hospital transport, Driving Miss Daisy, Total Mobility Vouchers, refresher driving courses and off-peak travel schemes can all help an older person to be more mobile in their community.

As well as having the physical spaces in a community accessible for older people, and ensuring older people have the strength, balance and confidence to get around easily, it is also important that we provide easy and affordable transport services to help older people be more mobile.

There are some good services in place already. Many of our Age Concerns provide minibus transport, or transport to the hospital, as well as refresher driver courses. “Driving Miss Daisy” is a great organisation for getting older people around (although at a cost) and Total Mobility Vouchers can help too.

However in some places, especially rural areas, there just isn’t enough. Public transport might be few and far between, or only run on weekends. Older people might have a relative or neighbour to take them to medical appointments, but what about if an older person just feels like going visiting? Or to the library? Or for a potter about the shops? Older people might not feel they can call on a favour for something they see as unnecessary – but actually being able to get out and about and be social is necessary, if older people are to be happy, healthy and socially connected.

Looking for the gaps in these transport services – and filling them – is hugely important and could go a long way to increasing mobility for older people.
8. Recommendations

8.1 Urban environment

The urban environment is quite commonly designed in a way that pedestrians are never far from busy traffic; footpaths are frequently trodden and so can fall into disrepair they need to be maintained regularly; traffic lights are phased in a way that is favourable to keeping traffic moving. Local councils are keen to ensure the urban area is aesthetically pleasing and to that end, like to plant trees, maintain road-side planters and design pavements that may look nice but they can be impractical for many pedestrians.

Urban speed limits need to be kept to a practical limit, for example 30 kph in “urban/built up” areas, where vehicles and pedestrians are in close proximity to each other.

Footpaths need to be laid in a way that is practical for pedestrians, e.g. smooth tarmac as opposed to fishbone bricks. These need to be kept well maintained and hazards noted and dealt with in a timely manner.

Pedestrian crossings need to be clearly visible for vehicles approaching. The timing of pedestrian crossing lights needs to be suitable for everyone to ensure pedestrians have no need to rush across the road. Ramps onto and off crossings need to perfectly line up with the pavements to avoid any trip hazards. Pedestrian crossings need to be well maintained.

8.2 Rural isolation

Older people who live in rural areas experience many different issues from those living in urban environments. Age Concern New Zealand urges the Transport and Industrial Relations Select Committee to give equal consideration to these two very different areas.

It is easy for an older person to become isolated in their small rural township or even their home. There is little or no public transport in certain areas and the “Total Mobility Scheme” is often absent from these rural communities. There are small taxi services in some communities, but these are a very expensive option for those living on a fixed income.

8.3 Public transport availability

Buses need to be frequent and available to serve the needs of the community. Regional authorities need to ensure that the wider population is well served by buses and must not focus purely on commuters. Many older people rely solely on public transport to maintain their independence. Following the recent review of the funding of the SuperGold card within regional authorities, Age Concern New Zealand urges Government to ensure that SuperGold card concessions remain available to all New Zealanders over the age of 65 regardless of whether or not a regional authority chooses to opt in to the scheme.

Age Concern New Zealand recommends that local taxi companies work with their local Age Concerns to ensure that drivers are trained in how best to assist their older customers.
8.4 Accessible buildings

New building design and renovation of older buildings needs to take into consideration the likely user of that building. As mentioned above, “age-friendly” design (or “universal design”) should be incorporated into the design of any new space to ensure that the space is not just accessible for older people, but for those with disabilities, those who may have young children in pushchairs, etc.

8.5 Interior layout of buildings

Consideration needs to be taken with the interior design of public buildings, and in particular shops. Many older people feel barred from certain shops as they find these shops too difficult to navigate. Shop doors can be heavy and some shops are only accessible via steps. Once inside a shop, aisles can be narrow to negotiate and often, display stands take up space within the narrow aisles. Many wheelchair and mobility scooter users find small dairies, pharmacies and other smaller shops too hard to navigate and so feel barred from entering.

This submission is the result of a consultation between all New Zealand Age Concerns and their networks of older people. Much of this submission has been informed by the comments that have come directly from older people living in the community and gives an honest view of matters concerning mobility and how all levels of society need to consider everyone when it comes to planning.

Many thanks for the opportunity for Age Concern New Zealand to comment on the Transport and Industrial Relations Select Committee inquiry into the future of New Zealand’s mobility.

Yours sincerely

Peter Oettli
President

Age Concern New Zealand