

OUSA in Person Submission on the ORC Long Term Plan

Tēnā Koutou Councillors, thank you for giving me the opportunity to come and speak to the Otago University Students' Association's Submission on the Otago Regional Council's Draft Long-Term Plan. The Otago University Student's Association supports the Regional Council's Draft Long Term Plan and encourages the Council to set bold goals, beyond its preferred options.

As has been reported in recent headlines in the Otago Daily Times and New Zealand Herald, the central government is pursuing a rolling-maul of austerity measures. A victim of this cost minimization program has been the Department of Conservation set with cuts set to reduce the ***department's*** budget by 6.5% through 130 job cuts. Secondly, as discussed in the OUSA's previous submission to the Regional Council, public transport funding has faced similar cuts. Particularly, with reference to the removal of half-price public transport fares for under 25's.

While it is unfortunate that I am once again asking the Council to pick up the Central Government's slack, here we are.

I found that students were broadly in support of the Large-Scale Environmental Fund, with the vast majority in favour of the two-million-dollar fund. I understand that the Council's preferred option is the five-hundred-thousand-dollar fund. However, I believe that a greater pool of funds the Council will empower the Otago Region, both in its now essential adaptation to climate change but also efforts to reduce the region's net carbon output.

A targeted rate for districts that choose to participate seems to me the fairest approach. While I do understand that the positive environmental spillovers over district boundaries

should potentially encourage everyone in the region to support it, this is a proposal that should lead by example. I believe that the proposed environmental fund, with the necessary funding of two-million dollar will show the wider region how successful a program like this can be.

I understand that the cost of the Environmental Fund does have many of you Councilors rightfully scared with the public disapproval of proposed rate increases. Of course, cost is an issue.

I would be remiss if I did not mention, as Councilors have reminded me, that many people are doing it tough. While I am here today representing students there is the omnipresent issue of the cost of living. People are having to spend more on their groceries, rent, and bills than at other times in recent memory. I understand that, and I hear their complaints: that the needs of our environment should come second to their need to put food on the table for their family.

To that, I would firstly present the environmental fund as an investment in the future of our region. Our primary and secondary industries are supported by a healthy and thriving environment that is increasingly choked by the climate crisis and a lack of historic concern.

Further, our tourism sector revolves around our beautiful environment, whether that's the ski-slopes in Queenstown or the numerous and stunning walking and cycling tracks around our region. Our environment and the TLC responsible for the maintenance of our environment is a worthwhile long-term economic investment in our regional economy.

Secondly, I would like to present that the increased rates set out in the Consultation document given out to the public do not set out massive costs to ratepayers on lower capital values.

The rate increases from the five-hundred-thousand dollar to two-million-dollar fund for those in Dunedin, which contains the most acutely deprived areas in Otago, is a difference of 3 dollars and 13 cents on a capital value of four-hundred-thousand. This is less than half the price of a cup of coffee.

On a capital value of eight-hundred-thousand-dollars in Dunedin the jump from the five-hundred-thousand-dollar to the two-million-dollar fund is \$6 and 29 cents. Which again, is roughly the full price of that cup of coffee.

As a student, I understand that in times of economic hardship every dollar and cent counts. However, I would argue that these rate increases are fair and justifiable given the previously mentioned economic benefits to be brought to ratepayers. These are not the substantial rate increases that the "five-hundred-thousand" and "two-million-dollar" price tags make it out to be. I believe this environmental fund has the potential to be one of the most worthwhile investments the Regional Council has made in a long-time. Again, to your average rate payer it will cost about the equivalent of a cup of coffee... although there is the possibility that I'm overpaying for my coffee here in Dunedin.

Moving onto the next student focused area; public transport! As I'm sure it will surprise no one, students are in favour of the offering of extra services on the Pine Hill, Calton Hill, Ōpoho and Shiel Hill routes. For students, who are spending more and more of their income

on rent and groceries, it's of great value to see their rates going further and farther on beautiful Orbus Electric Buses.

In fact, since its digital submission the OUSA has reflected on the value of public transport particularly to students but to all residents around Otago. The OUSA wishes to raise the value of transport needs on public holidays.

For many people, not just students who are employed in the service industry, their jobs don't stop on public holidays, and it is the position of the OUSA that students should be supported in their desire to work by having access to public transport on public holidays.

For many businesses, they already see a great level of business during public holidays and the Regional Council can further support this by allowing more people easy access into town. I believe that offering public transport on public holidays would be of great value both to the student population but also to the region more widely.

To talk briefly on the addition of a general rate to public transport, I would say that students largely support this rate adjustment. It is fair that the region funds public transport as it experiences the benefits of improved connectivity, reducing congestion and supporting emission targets. Public transport has been shown to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to two-thirds per passenger, per kilometer compared to private vehicles. Public transport also lowers traffic fatalities and provides greater access to employment, education and urban services.

The new rate model better reflects the wider external benefits in the use of public transport services.

Throughout the rest of the draft plan, the Otago University Students' Association supports the Council's preferred options, particularly on the new rates systems as they concern flood protection, drainage and river management rates.

Thank you again for taking the OUSA's Submission.