# Bus fare policies to improve equity in access to education

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| Education plays a key role in social equity. It not only provides the tools for opening opportunities in later life, it contributes to people’s wellbeing and sense of belonging to the community. According to the OECD, ‘*learning is seen as vital not just to a countries’ economic development but to their social cohesion and quality of life’.* But education rights are sometimes obstructed or impeded by several causes. Many of the reasons behind education deprivation are complex, hard to address and with long-term turnarounds. Nevertheless, transport policies can contribute to better outcomes by removing barriers to movement between home and school. The Bay of Plenty Regional Council and Beca are studying the implementation of different fare policy scenarios for school children as a way of improving access to education. An early trial of free school buses indicates that truancy levels have reduced and children are late to school less often as a result of the trial. Bus passenger volumes have had a sustained increase above 40%. This paper will describe the study and analysis leading to the implementation of free school buses in Tauranga, the predicted costs and benefits and initial results of a city-wide free school bus initiative that begins early 2020. The objective is to share information on the range of tangible transport and social benefits associated with free school buses, which could be replicated elsewhere to greatly improve equity in transport to education. |