

TRANSPORTATION CONFERENCE 2026 MOBILITY PARKING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

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ABSTRACT

There are over 190,000 mobility parking permit holders in New Zealand, and that number is projected to increase by 65% by the 2040s. However, there is a dearth of data to inform mobility parking provision in Aotearoa. While parking is required at set ratios at private facilities, there is no known rationale for these ratios. Neither are there any known insights into how many mobility parking spaces are a 'good' number to provide on public streets, in different contexts.

This paper describes mobility parking in the context of New Zealand legislation and then summarises research into

1. the changing, growing population of permit holders, including projected numbers in coming decades;
2. demand for mobility parking by trip purpose and how it varies, according to surveys of permit holders;
3. common barriers to access faced by people using a mobility park, including their access between the park and the nearest public footpath; and
4. advice for councils in terms of how to decide on the number, location, and layout of mobility parking spaces.

The paper fills a gap in nationwide understanding of mobility parking demand and supply. It can help councils shift from a largely reactive, request-based approach to provision of mobility parking, towards a more objective assessment of how to allocate public space in ways that demonstrably meet people's needs as much as possible. Known trade-offs and limitations are also described. This practice paper is about understanding the role of mobility parking in inclusive urban places. By understanding who is excluded, why, where, and when, investment can best be justified and prioritised where it's needed most.

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses mobility parking demand and provision in New Zealand. Its purpose is to provide guidance and support for those making decisions about the number, location and format of mobility parking spaces.

In contrast to public parking in general, there is very little evidence Councils and private developers can draw on to prioritise the number and location of mobility parks. This is a problem because many people who rely on mobility parking report a poor experience. In research into disabled New Zealanders' experiences of transport, challenges with parking, including mobility parking availability and suitability, were the most common reason that disabled people reported not being able to make or complete a trip (Doran et al., 2022). At the same time, Councils are under increasing pressure to justify asset management decisions, including for all forms of public parking. Therefore, guidance on mobility parking is timely.

This paper summarises available evidence including previously uncollated findings, to help inform more objective decision-making by transport professionals about mobility parking.

BACKGROUND

What is a mobility parking permit?

The purpose of the mobility parking permit scheme is to promote access for people who need the proximity of a parking space near a destination; accessibility of a larger parking space with an accessible route to the nearest footpath; or both. The mobility parking scheme is administered by CCS Disability Action. The following criteria must be met for a permit to be received, and signed off by a medical practitioner:

- *[A person is] unable to walk and always require the use of a wheelchair, or*
- *[their] ability to walk distances is severely restricted by a medical condition or disability. For example, if [they] require the use of mobility aids, experience severe pain or breathlessness, or*
- *[they] have a medical condition or disability that requires [them] to have physical contact or close supervision to safely get around and cannot be left unattended. For example, if [they] experience disorientation, confusion, or severe anxiety.*

(CCS Disability Action, n.d.)

Permits can be for an individual or an organisation and can be short-term or long-term. There is a fee for a permit which currently varies from \$10 (for a short-term extension) to \$50 (for a five-year permit).

Mobility parking and the law

Mobility parking supply on public streets in New Zealand is not governed by specific law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNDRPD) discusses disabled people's rights generally but parking is not a specific requirement. There are parking specifications in relevant local planning rules such as District Plans. Thus, there is no specific legal requirement for mobility parking to be provided on public streets beyond the high-level directives within the UNCRPD, and the intent derived from local plans.

Specific laws we have concerning mobility parking in private (off-street) facilities are in the Building Act. These details are within the New Zealand Standard 4121:2001 (NZS4121). Many local authorities have adopted the details from NZS4121 for the design of their on- and off-street mobility parking spaces.

There is no definition of an accessible carpark in the Building Act. Rather, practitioners are referred to the NZ Standard (see above) for specifications.

Characteristics of the mobility parking permit population

In 2025 there were over 190,000 active mobility parking permits in New Zealand. The population of mobility parking permit holders is different from the general public in three main ways:

- 1) Disability
- 2) Age structure
- 3) Income diversity
- 4) Trip demands and characteristics

Obviously, people who qualify for a mobility parking permit find it more difficult to move around than the general public. However, a person with a mobility parking permit does not necessarily identify as a disabled person, and not all disabled people have a mobility parking permit. The reasons for the differences are first, disability and mobility parking needs are not the same; second, there is a cost for a mobility parking permit (and in many cases an additional fee for an assessment by a General Practitioner) which is a barrier for many people; and third, many people do not know about the mobility parking permit scheme in the first place.

One of the under-representations in the permit population is for Māori. Māori represent 18% of New Zealand's population and have higher rates of disability in every age group than most non-Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2025a) but are just 11% of the population of mobility parking permit holders (CCS Disability Action, personal communication).

In terms of age, there are stark differences between the general and mobility parking permit populations. Of over 190,000 permit holders in 2025, 78% were aged 65 years or older (compared with 17% of the general population) and 26% were aged 85 years or older (2% of the general population). This difference alone suggests that the number of permit holders will rise in coming years, alongside an ageing New Zealand population. See 'projected permit numbers' below.

There is evidence to suggest income diversity within the mobility parking permit population although income data is not typically gathered for this group. Feedback from people with permits (Doran et al., 2022) revealed that while some mobility parking permit holders were also part of the Total Mobility scheme (which provides subsidised taxis for qualifying people), many rationalised their trips due to cost. Others did not report any transport disadvantage and appreciated both Total Mobility and the mobility parking permit in supporting them to live a full and rich life. It is important for those working on mobility parking to remember that the needs and means of permit holders are diverse. Furthermore, those with the fewest options can be the least likely to have the energy, knowledge, and power to advocate on their own behalf (Twardzick et al., 2025).

Trip demands and characteristics

While it is true that the majority of mobility parking permit holders are older people, with close to 70% aged over 70 years, the population is diverse. It includes working people, students, families, parents and caregivers of disabled people, students, and volunteers. This means that every place any person might like to go is a place a person with a mobility parking permit can be assumed to want to access.

There has been no specific analysis of travel behaviour of mobility parking permit holders compared with the general population. New Zealand's Household Travel Survey under-represents disabled people and older people, making it difficult to use that data as a proxy for this population.

An important myth to counter is that accessible transport such as mobility parking ought to be prioritised at, or near to, aged residential care facilities. People who live in aged residential care (which is different from a retirement village) are far less likely than the general population to travel independently, and to travel outside of their home at all. They are typically excluded from population travel surveys, presumably due to very low trip rates (e.g. Liu & Tight, 2021; Ministry of Transport, 2022). All people, including those living in residential care, deserve access of all forms, but prioritising mobility parking requires an understanding of the whole community of permit holders. See Recommendations below for a discussion of how to prioritise new mobility parking spaces, and for whom.

Projected permit numbers

Knowing the age structure of the mobility parking permit population means that we can analyse population projections to estimate permit numbers in the future. Population projections from Statistics NZ are based on assumptions about migration, births and deaths. 'Medium' projections have been used to forecast permit numbers in 2033 and 2043 (Statistics NZ, 2025b).

The data in Figures 1 and 2 show New Zealand's total, and mobility parking permit populations' age structures in 2025, and projected structures in 2033 and 2043. Figure 2 provides finer detail on the projected changes to older populations. This detail is provided to emphasise the large number of older people with mobility parking permits.

These data show that, as described above, the mobility parking permit population is an old population. New Zealand's population is ageing, which means that we have a decreasing birth rate alongside increasing longevity. As people get older, they are increasingly likely to acquire a mobility parking permit, so an increasing older population results in a disproportionately increasing permit holder population.

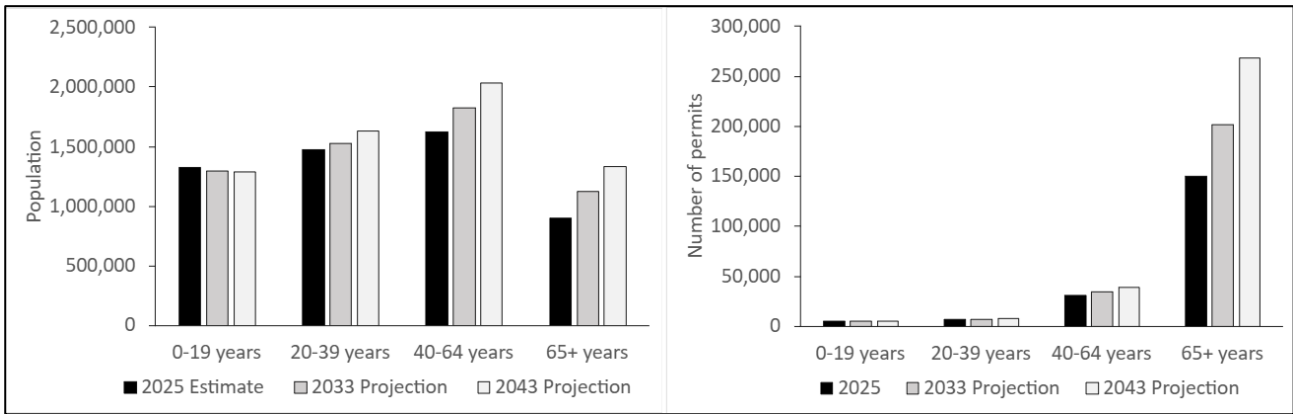


Figure 1 New Zealand population estimate and projections (left) and mobility permit numbers and projections (right), for 2025, 2033, and 2043, for all ages, split into four age groups

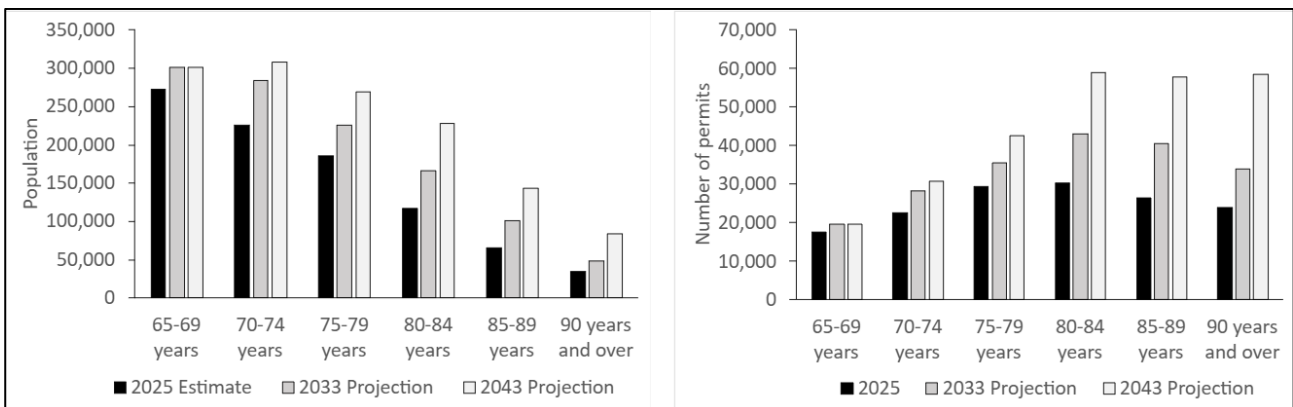


Figure 2 New Zealand population estimate and projections (left) and mobility permit numbers and projections (right), for 2025, 2033, and 2043, for ages 65+, split into six age groups

New Zealand’s population is projected to increase from an estimated 5,325,000 in 2025 by approximately 8 percent to 2033 (5,767,000 people) and by 17 percent to 2043 (6,284,000 people). Over the same time period the number of mobility parking permits is projected to increase by 28% to 2033 (248,000 permits), and 65% to 2043 (320,000 permits). These projections are based on a changing population structure alone, assuming the same proportion of permits in each age group as was the case in 2025.

These projections are for all New Zealand. In many districts with more rapidly ageing populations, the increase in mobility parking permit numbers is projected to increase faster. In some places mobility parking permit numbers can be expected to double between 2025 and 2035.

Mobility parking permit holders’ perspectives

Issues emerging from surveys of mobility parking permit holders in New Zealand revealed the following insights about finding and using mobility parks.

- 1) People’s reasons for getting and using a mobility parking permit are diverse

The eligibility criteria for mobility parking permits allow for a wide range of reasons people have. Many have difficulty walking, but some have no difficulty at all. Reasons other than walking difficulty might include that a person is blind or has low vision; they are

neurodivergent and experience extreme anxiety, making a more proximal parking space useful; they have chronic pain which may or may not be experienced constantly; or a variety of other reasons at the discretion of the individual, and the assessing medical practitioner.

Some people with a permit drive their own vehicle. Some of those have modified vehicles, including some with robotic arms to transfer a wheelchair to the rear of their vehicle. Some people with a permit do not drive or drive only some of the time. Some own a vehicle, and others use it only when traveling with others, including in taxis or other private rideshare. Some people use a mobility parking space as an accessible drop-off and do not park for an extended time. Others use parking as anyone in the public would, for work, shopping, recreation, attending an event, or all manner of other activities.

2) Proximity to a destination is make-or-break for many

Evidence from a survey of over 500 mobility parking permit holders in Napier found that that fifty percent of mobility parking permit holders need to park within 50m of the front door of their trip's destination. For many, if they cannot park right outside their destination, they do not access that destination. The consequences of this lack of access affect the individual, and the local community and economy because whatever the person was going to do while out cannot be done.

3) Enforcement of mobility parking is a concern throughout New Zealand.

There is no known data on the extent of mobility parking abuse, but permit holders report frequently seeing spaces occupied by vehicles that are not showing a permit. The impact of a large number of short-duration abuse of mobility parking spaces is significant. Some permit holders report that they rely on a specific space being available for both proximity and accessibility reasons. If it is occupied, they will simply return home.

4) Some people need a mobility parking space with specific orientation to a kerb

Mobility parking spaces can be angled at 90 degrees, a more acute angle, or be parallel to a kerb. Some people can use any kind of space, while others can only use one kind. For example, some people who drive with a permit will not use a parallel space that requires them to exit into a live traffic lane. Some people who use a wheelchair-accessible vehicle need space behind it for a ramp and/or hoist to enable access and egress from their vehicle. Some people prefer or need a space with the passenger seat next to a kerb so that they can get out of the vehicle directly onto the footpath. For some people who have a permit for a disabled child or children, they need space and safety to navigate getting their child or children into and out of the vehicle safely.

5) Mobility parking spaces do not always meet relevant local standards

The specifications for mobility parking require certain dimensions, clear width around the space, clear line marking, and step-free access to the nearest public footpath or building entry. Permit holders frequently report that these criteria are not met. One of the most common failures is related to the accessible route between a parking space and the nearest footpath. The necessary kerb cut (where there is a change in level between the parking space and the footpath) is often absent, in need of repair, or otherwise unsuitable. For people who use a wheelchair or other mobility aid with small wheels, they report frequently having to travel down a live traffic lane, or parking lane, to find the nearest accessible kerb cut. These

deficiencies can make a mobility parking space inaccessible for many permit holders.

6) **Mobility parking time limits are often inadequate**

Many permit holders report not having enough time in a parking space. Some need longer to complete their outing (away from the vehicle) than other people. In some places, permit holders are allowed longer than the prevailing general parking limits, and many mobility parking spaces are provided free of charge. However, given that many permit holders also report difficulty finding a vacant parking space, some permit holders suggest that time limits ought to balance people's time needs with consideration of turnover so that the spaces can be used by as many people as optimal, through a day.

7) **Information about mobility parking can be difficult to find, and to trust**

Given the challenges described above, many people with a mobility parking permit try to find out information about spaces as part of planning an outing. This is particularly important for people traveling to unfamiliar places. Some people rely on online maps to review a space, but that information is not necessarily current. Some councils have online maps and information about mobility parking but that can also be out of date, or insufficient – for example, an online map of mobility parking spaces does not typically include information about the location of the nearest accessible kerb cut. Many permit holders are adept at using technology, but some do not have internet access and may still rely on paper maps.

MOBILITY PARKING SUPPLY

There is no known research-based rationale for the number of mobility spaces required in either private, off-street facilities, on streets, or in off-street public parking areas in New Zealand. It is up to local councils and other authorities to provide what they see as a suitable number, without specific guidance for different on-street or off-street situations.

Off-street parking facilities

In terms of parking for off-street parking areas, the Building Act requires compliance with NZ Standard 4121:2001. Required spaces are expressed as a ratio of the total number of public spaces provided, as follows:

- For one to 20 car parks: not less than 1 mobility park
- 21 – 50 spaces: not less than 2 mobility parks
- For every additional 50 car parks: not less than 1 additional mobility park

On-street and public off-street facilities

Many councils follow the Building Code ratios (above) for off-street ratios, but these are not known to be based on any data. A review of local and some international approaches to mobility parking supply reached the same conclusions: there are no commonly applied ratios or minimum required number of spaces on-street, that local authorities use to determine how many mobility parking spaces to provide (Auckland Council, n.d.). However, many councils have policies or guidance that informs their decision-making.

For example, Wellington City Council has a guide to the provision of mobility parking (Wellington City Council, n.d.) The guide lists the following inputs into decisions about the placement of mobility parking spaces:

- Consult with disabled people and the Accessibility Advisory Group

- Consider a range of factors to help inform the placement of a new, relocated or additional mobility parking space
- Replace mobility parking spaces with like for like wherever practical
- Locate mobility parking spaces in pairs wherever practical
- Locate mobility parking spaces in low traffic volume streets wherever possible and within 200 metres of the intended destination
- Consider the provision of other publicly available mobility parking spaces
- Consider whether the mobility parking space designation should be time-restricted

That is, Wellington City makes decisions about mobility parking considering a range of factors. The note about spaces being within 200m of the ‘intended destination’ is not qualified with any research to suggest why that distance was selected, or how a ‘destination’ is decided.

In Australia, similar rules exist to New Zealand. Supply of mobility parking in off-street facilities is governed by ratios in a similar way to our Building Act. Supply of parking on public streets is set by local authorities. In the Australian Capital Territory, the required proportion is 3% (Australian Network on Disability, n.d.) but it is unclear how that ratio was determined. In the UK and Ireland, local authorities tend to set policy for provision of accessible (mobility) parking. In Ireland, the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design suggest that accessible parking should make up at least 6% of parking spaces provided for ‘shops, leisure and recreational facilities, and other buildings to which the public has access’ (as cited in Auckland Council, n.d., p13).

Summary of mobility parking challenges and opportunities

Evidence in this paper has shown that

- Councils have inherited a number of mobility parking spaces, with little evidence they can use to change its nature or supply
- The population of mobility parking permit holders is large and growing faster than New Zealand’s population, projected to increase to 320,000 by 2043
- Permit holders are a diverse population with a variety of specific needs, that are not always met by the current mobility parking stock

Central to these challenges is a lack of data to inform more objective planning and priorities for mobility parking as a whole. This gap suggests recommendations as follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS

National level leadership on mobility parking

Transportation planning typically relies on data to inform specifications for public infrastructure. Parking supply in general is informed by surveys of use, for different facilities. Those surveys are regularly updated and refined. However, there are no known surveys of mobility parking demand according to different street and land use contexts. It would be useful for government at a national level to deliver that evidence, so that all authorities could benefit from it.

Local planning: technical audit and community insights

In the absence of other evidence, the best way to make informed decisions about mobility parking is to

- 1) Know what you have: technical audit of current mobility parking supply and characteristics

A technical audit of mobility parking spaces is a useful way to determine the number, location, orientation, and quality of existing spaces. Results of a technical audit can also be used to map parking information to make it accessible to those who need it.

- 2) Gather insights from community: engage with the local mobility parking permit population to understand their priorities and challenges.

Surveys of community can provide in-depth insight into the nature of the local mobility parking permit population, and subjective priorities for changes. Residents could also be asked about what they like about current provision. It is useful to know what people like, because the layout and location of most preferred spaces can inform the design and location of others, now and into the future.

If a survey is not possible or practical, a reasonable next step would be to engage with any local community groups that include mobility parking permit holders. Local clubs and organisations may be able to bring together a few people for a conversation. The drawback to this approach is of course that it will be unclear how representative the views are, of the broader permit holder population.

What to do without data

In the absence of data about use and suitability of parking, it is reasonable to increase the number of spaces as the number of local mobility parking permit holders increases. Analysis of the local population structure and projected changes can be used to estimate increases in the permit holder population. If for example there is a projected increase in permit of 50% by 2033, it would be reasonable to increase the number of mobility parking spaces by 50% over that same time (assuming that current supply is meeting demand).

In terms of where to put spaces, guidance for off-street parking facilities requires one space per facility, and an additional space per fifty public spaces. In a town centre or shopping street context a similar principle might apply. The challenge is to define what constitutes a 'facility'; bearing in mind that it is likely that around 50% of permit holders need to park within 50m of the front door of their destination. On any main street there could be several destinations where people could reasonably be expected to visit.

The following facilities / centres warrant at least one parking space as close to their 'front door' or main entry point as possible:

- Council building, and any public facilities such as libraries, parks, and swimming pool
- Main shopping streets: at least one space for every 100m of street is desirable, given that many people need these spaces close to their destination. Spaces close to accessible road crossings are useful.
- At the location of any places where public or private buses or shuttles might stop to collect and drop off passengers

In short, a useful formula to calculate the required number of mobility parking spaces for a town centre might be:

*Number of mobility parking spaces for a town centre or shopping street
= One space per 'destination', plus a further space per 100m of on-street parking*

If there is a local accessibility advisory group, the order of priority for new spaces could be agreed in discussion with them, ideally with further engagement with the local community of permit holders. That way, new spaces can be constructed as budget allows.

As well as planning for new spaces, it would be useful for councils to:

- Increase levels of enforcement of mobility parking compliance if possible
- Work with local media to remind the public of the reasons for mobility parking and the rules of use
- Provide online and on-street maps of the locations of mobility parking spaces, as well as other information including the locations of accessible seating, public toilets, and Council amenities.

Ongoing advocacy for more inclusive communities

Councils around New Zealand could combine through organisations such as the Regional Councils' Transport Special Interest Group, Trafinz, the Transportation Group, and others to advocate for more research effort into mobility parking provision by land use, for a more robust evidence-base to inform mobility parking provision.

Mobility parking is an important component of accessible journeys for many people. However, there are many other areas of transport policy and planning that can help to manage parking demand. They are predicated on valuing inclusive, sustainable access. Many people who travel by car would travel in other ways, if alternatives were affordable, dignified, and safe. Priorities for investment in walking, cycling, community transport and public transport could be better informed by surveys of *unmet need* in transport. More policy insights are discussed in Doran et al., 2022.

CONCLUSION

New Zealand's mobility parking permit population is large, growing, and under-researched. This leaves councils and other local authorities with scant evidence to manage and grow mobility parking supply, which is a challenge given increasingly constrained budgets. More data is needed to understand the diverse needs of permit holders, at national and local levels. In the meantime, authorities can take practical steps to prioritise local mobility parking improvements that better serve the needs of everyone in their local communities.

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