



Co-Designing Resilient Transport Solutions in Resource-Constrained Environments

Faced with a funding shortfall for a proposed bus service connecting three peri- urban communities to Hamilton, Waikato Regional Council and Waikato District Council took a collaborative and community-led approach to deliver a solution. When NZ Transport Agency / Waka Kotahi declined to co-fund the service, WDC stepped in to fully fund a trial, recognising the social and economic need for improved connectivity.

Given the funding constraints, trade-offs were inevitable - including service hours, frequency, vehicle type, and weekend coverage. This made early and meaningful community engagement essential. Through co-design workshops with the Tamahere Community Board, the Matangi Community Committee, and a hui at Tauwhare Pā supported by WRC's Tai-ranga-whenua team, a shared service design was developed. Each community brought unique cultural and socio-economic perspectives, and all made compromises to achieve a common goal.

A key outcome of the co-design process was the decision to avoid duplicating Ministry of Education school services. Timetables were carefully designed to ensure the new service did not meet the definition of 'suitable public transport', preserving existing school routes.

At its 18-month review, the results exceeded expectations:

- Patronage reached 10,531 passengers - 41% above forecast.
- Farebox revenue totalled \$23,613 - 63% above projections (but influenced by changes in fares over this time).
- Passenger behaviour showed a high tolerance for trip chaining, indicating strong demand despite service limitations.

This case demonstrates that resilient, community-supported transport solutions are achievable even in resource-constrained settings. Despite a farebox recovery of only ~6.5% on this peri-urban service, assessments and service evaluations should not rest solely on economic metrics: co-designed, fit-for-purpose routes in rural areas deliver critical social connection, equitable access, and strategic connectivity that strengthen community wellbeing and economic opportunity - ultimately building a more resilient transport future for Aotearoa.