

# Memo

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**Date:** 19 May 2026

**To:** WRC Transport Committee  
Katherine Simpson, Team Leader – Transport Planning

**From:** Vincent Kuo, Team Leader – Contracts and Insights

**Subject:** **2026.05.19 Regional Transport Connections PT Update re. the Fuel Situation**

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## Purpose of this memo

This memorandum provides the second fortnightly update to the WRC Transport Committee on the current fuel environment and its impacts on public transport service delivery. The update is intended to support Committee oversight by summarising key operational and financial indicators, and by highlighting emerging risks and responses associated with fuel cost volatility.

## Scope of this update

This memo focuses primarily on recent trends in public transport patronage across bus and rail services, changes in operating costs driven by fuel price movements, and the extent to which fare revenue has offset increased costs. It also outlines any other relevant developments that are considered worth mentioning. Subsequent sections provide more detailed commentary on each of these matters.

It should also be noted that the patronage and fare revenue data (including the % of change between years) for the most recent week presented is provisional and may be subject to minor revision in subsequent reports. This reflects the timing of data extraction, as final figures depend on the capture of complete data for the last day of the reporting period.

New Zealand currently remains at “Phase 1: Watchful” in the national Fuel Response Plan where access to fuel remains steady and available but fuel prices are rising due to global market changes.

## Public transport patronage (bus and rail)

The table below presents public transport (bus and rail) patronage data from February to the end of week 20 in both 2025 and 2026, to support year-on-year comparison. It is important to note that direct weekly comparisons between years do not always provide a like-for-like assessment due to variations in the timing of public and school holidays as discussed in detail the previous memo.

For this reason, data has been presented from the beginning of February rather than focusing solely on the most recent fortnight. Committee members will also note that comparative data for the Te Huia service has not been included for weeks 16 and 17, as the service did not operate during these weeks in 2025 due to line closures. Actual patronage figures for weeks 16 and 17 in 2026 are, however, included in the table below.

For clarity, while the below data presents public transport (bus and rail) patronage, the patronage information does not include data from the Thames Connector, 25-Taumarunui and Night Flex services.

<b>Patronage Summary</b>			
	<b>Bus service</b>	<b>Train service</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Before Fuel Price Increase</b>			
<b>Week 6</b>			
(2025-02-03 - 2025-02-09)	74922	1185	76107
(2026-02-02 - 2026-02-08)	74774	1024	75798
<b>Week 7</b>			
(2025-02-10 - 2025-02-16)	93520	1636	95156
(2026-02-09 - 2026-02-15)	90577	1686	92263
<b>Week 8</b>			
(2025-02-17 - 2025-02-23)	98954	1562	100516
(2026-02-16 - 2026-02-22)	94027	1905	95932
<b>Week 9</b>			
(2025-02-24 - 2025-03-02)	101733	1599	103332
(2026-02-23 - 2026-03-01)	98105	1985	100090
<b>Fuel Price Increased</b>			
<b>Week 10</b>			
(2025-03-03 - 2025-03-09)	100516	1576	102092
(2026-03-02 - 2026-03-08)	101516	1666	103182
<b>Week 11</b>			
(2025-03-10 - 2025-03-16)	100599	1820	102419
(2026-03-09 - 2026-03-15)	99562	1844	101406
<b>Week 12</b>			
(2025-03-17 - 2025-03-23)	96464	1578	98042
(2026-03-16 - 2026-03-22)	101764	1973	103737
<b>Week 13</b>			
(2025-03-24 - 2025-03-30)	96902	1745	98647
(2026-03-23 - 2026-03-29)	97957	2169	100126
<b>Week 14</b>			
(2025-03-31 - 2025-04-06)	91286	1430	92716
(2026-03-30 - 2026-04-05)	84979	1311	86290
<b>Week 15</b>			
(2025-04-07 - 2025-04-13)	93601	1367	94968
(2026-04-06 - 2026-04-12)	54099	1908	56007
<b>Week 16</b>			
(2025-04-14 - 2025-04-20)	50656		50656
(2026-04-13 - 2026-04-19)	64960	2483	67443
<b>Week 17</b>			
(2025-04-21 - 2025-04-27)	47022		47022
(2026-04-20 - 2026-04-26)	98462	1543	100005
<b>Week 18</b>			
(2025-04-28 - 2025-05-04)	91303	1454	92757
(2026-04-27 - 2026-05-03)	87459	1813	89272
<b>Week 19</b>			
(2025-05-05 - 2025-05-11)	92680	1447	94127
(2026-05-04 - 2026-05-10)	97873	1914	99787
<b>Week 20</b>			
(2025-05-12 - 2025-05-18)	92981	1740	94721

(2026-05-11 - 2026-05-17)	97463	2226	99689
<b>Total Fare Revenue: Week 10 - 20</b>			
(2025-03-03 - 2025-05-18)	954010	14157	968167
(2026-03-02 - 2026-05-17)	986094	20850	1006944

The following table presents the percentage change in public transport patronage on a week-by-week basis, comparing each week with the equivalent week in the previous year. This provides an indication of relative growth or decline in patronage over time, while accounting for seasonal patterns and variability across the reporting period.

Period Type	Weeks	Bus service		Train service
<b>Before Fuel Price Increase</b>				
	Week 6	▼	-0.2%	▼ -13.6%
	Week 7	▼	-3.1%	▲ 3.1%
	Week 8	▼	-5.0%	▲ 22.0%
	Week 9	▼	-3.6%	▲ 24.1%
<b>Fuel Price Increased</b>				
	Week 10	▲	1.0%	▲ 5.7%
	Week 11	▼	-1.0%	▲ 1.3%
	Week 12	▲	5.5%	▲ 25.0%
	Week 13	▲	1.1%	▲ 24.3%
	Week 14	▼	-6.9%	▼ -8.3%
	Week 15	▼	-42.2%	▲ 39.6%
	Week 16	▲	28.2%	
	Week 17	▲	109.4%	
	Week 18	▼	-4.2%	▲ 24.7%
	Week 19	▲	5.6%	▲ 32.3%
	Week 20	▲	4.8%	▲ 27.9%

The following key observations summarise week-by-week changes in public transport patronage for 2026 compared with the same period in 2025.

- Early divergence between modes pre-fuel increase: Prior to the fuel price increase (Weeks 6–9), bus patronage remained slightly below 2025 levels, while rail patronage showed strong and increasing growth from Week 8 onward, indicating an earlier recovery in rail demand.
- Gradual bus recovery following fuel price increase: From Week 10 onwards, bus patronage begins to stabilise and show modest growth, suggesting a gradual return to previous levels and a possible early behavioural response to increased fuel costs.
- Holiday-driven volatility still evident: Significant fluctuations in Weeks 14–17 continue to reflect the Easter and school holiday period, particularly the sharp decline in bus patronage in Week 15 (-42.2%) followed by a strong rebound. Rail patronage remains comparatively resilient through this period.
- Clear post-holiday strengthening trend, particularly for rail: From Week 18 through Weeks 19 and 20, both modes show more stable growth. Bus patronage records moderate increases (around 5%), while rail continues to demonstrate strong and sustained growth (approximately 25–32%), suggesting strengthening demand and a potential ongoing shift toward public transport following fuel price increases.

## Public transport fare revenue (bus and rail)

It has been identified that, while the weekly fare revenue figures were accurate, the “total fare revenue for Weeks 10–18” reported in the previous memo was incorrect. We apologise for this error and any confusion it may have caused.

The table below presents public transport (bus and rail) fare revenue for the period from February to the end of April for both 2025 and 2026, to enable year-on-year comparison. Revenue figures reflect farebox revenue only (excluding GST) collected directly from customers and do not include any subsidies, café sales, or bus-back advertising income. Similar to the patronage above, this data does not include fare revenue data from the Thames Connector, 25-Taumarunui and Night Flex services.

As with patronage data, it is important to note that direct comparisons between equivalent weeks are influenced by differences in the timing of public and school holidays between the two years. In addition, the impact of the Te Huia line closures in 2025 also affects comparability across parts of the dataset. These factors should be taken into account when interpreting trends over the reporting period.

The following table presents the change in public transport fare revenue on a week-by-week basis, comparing each week with the corresponding week in the previous year. This provides an indication of relative changes in fare revenue over time and should be interpreted alongside patronage trends and known seasonal influences, including variations in school holidays and the impact of the Te Huia service disruption in 2025.

<b>Revenue collect from customer summary</b>			
	<b>Bus service</b>	<b>Train service</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>
<b>Before Fuel Price Increase</b>			
<b>Week 6</b>			
(2025-02-03 - 2025-02-09)	\$ 112,528.61	\$ 12,954.26	\$ 125,482.87
(2026-02-02 - 2026-02-08)	\$ 119,337.47	\$ 12,547.66	\$ 131,885.13
<b>Week 7</b>			
(2025-02-10 - 2025-02-16)	\$ 138,497.39	\$ 17,483.30	\$ 155,980.70
(2026-02-09 - 2026-02-15)	\$ 142,265.96	\$ 20,886.02	\$ 163,151.97
<b>Week 8</b>			
(2025-02-17 - 2025-02-23)	\$ 147,854.87	\$ 18,163.83	\$ 166,018.70
(2026-02-16 - 2026-02-22)	\$ 148,088.64	\$ 21,183.26	\$ 169,271.90
<b>Week 9</b>			
(2025-02-24 - 2025-03-02)	\$ 147,817.30	\$ 18,070.70	\$ 165,888.00
(2026-02-23 - 2026-03-01)	\$ 152,905.53	\$ 22,825.10	\$ 175,730.63
<b>Fuel Price Increased</b>			
<b>Week 10</b>			
(2025-03-03 - 2025-03-09)	\$ 145,827.39	\$ 17,099.48	\$ 162,926.87
(2026-03-02 - 2026-03-08)	\$ 156,273.58	\$ 19,066.38	\$ 175,339.97
<b>Week 11</b>			
(2025-03-10 - 2025-03-16)	\$ 145,507.22	\$ 20,275.83	\$ 165,783.04
(2026-03-09 - 2026-03-15)	\$ 153,134.34	\$ 21,869.06	\$ 175,003.40
<b>Week 12</b>			
(2025-03-17 - 2025-03-23)	\$ 141,000.52	\$ 16,913.04	\$ 157,913.57
(2026-03-16 - 2026-03-22)	\$ 156,206.99	\$ 22,728.15	\$ 178,935.14
<b>Week 13</b>			

(2025-03-24 - 2025-03-30)	\$ 139,218.87	\$ 17,645.74	\$ 156,864.61
(2026-03-23 - 2026-03-29)	\$ 149,447.66	\$ 21,451.23	\$ 170,898.90
<b>Week 14</b>			
(2025-03-31 - 2025-04-06)	\$ 134,175.83	\$ 16,122.09	\$ 150,297.91
(2026-03-30 - 2026-04-05)	\$ 130,487.68	\$ 14,329.04	\$ 144,816.72
<b>Week 15</b>			
(2025-04-07 - 2025-04-13)	\$ 134,254.61	\$ 14,057.39	\$ 148,312.00
(2026-04-06 - 2026-04-12)	\$ 69,491.08	\$ 23,711.17	\$ 93,202.25
<b>Week 16</b>			
(2025-04-14 - 2025-04-20)	\$ 64,655.48		\$ 64,655.48
(2026-04-13 - 2026-04-19)	\$ 83,965.93	\$ 30,695.99	\$ 114,661.92
<b>Week 17</b>			
(2025-04-21 - 2025-04-27)	\$ 58,018.87		\$ 58,018.87
(2026-04-20 - 2026-04-26)	\$ 147,736.32	\$ 18,052.80	\$ 165,789.12
<b>Week 18</b>			
(2025-04-28 - 2025-05-04)	\$ 132,905.65	\$ 15,094.87	\$ 148,000.52
(2026-04-27 - 2026-05-03)	\$ 133,101.45	\$ 17,480.01	\$ 150,581.46
<b>Week 19</b>			
(2025-05-05 - 2025-05-11)	\$ 133,391.04	\$ 15,611.22	\$ 149,002.26
(2026-05-04 - 2026-05-10)	\$ 148,173.23	\$ 20,821.52	\$ 168,994.76
<b>Week 20</b>			
(2025-05-12 - 2025-05-18)	\$ 133,700.78	\$ 17,544.52	\$ 151,245.30
(2026-05-11 - 2026-05-17)	\$ 146,764.37	\$ 23,057.70	\$ 169,822.08
<b>Total Fare Revenue: Week 10 - 20</b>			
(2025-03-03 - 2025-05-18)	\$ 1,362,656.26	\$ 150,364.17	\$ 1,513,020.43
(2026-03-02 - 2026-05-17)	\$ 1,474,782.64	\$ 233,263.07	\$ 1,708,045.71

The following table presents the percentage change in public transport fare revenue on a week-by-week basis, comparing each week with the equivalent week in the previous year. This provides an indication of relative growth or decline in revenue over time, while accounting for seasonal patterns and variability across the reporting period.

Period Type	Weeks	Bus service	Train service
<b>Before Fuel Price Increase</b>			
	Week 6 ▲	6.1%	▼ -3.1%
	Week 7 ▲	2.7%	▲ 19.5%
	Week 8 ▲	0.2%	▲ 16.6%
	Week 9 ▲	3.4%	▲ 26.3%
<b>Fuel Price Increased</b>			
	Week 10 ▲	7.2%	▲ 11.5%
	Week 11 ▲	5.2%	▲ 7.9%
	Week 12 ▲	10.8%	▲ 34.4%
	Week 13 ▲	7.3%	▲ 21.6%
	Week 14 ▼	-2.7%	▼ -11.1%
	Week 15 ▼	-48.2%	▲ 68.7%
	Week 16 ▲	29.9%	
	Week 17 ▲	154.6%	
	Week 18 ▲	0.1%	▲ 15.8%
	Week 19 ▲	11.1%	▲ 33.4%
	Week 20 ▲	9.8%	▲ 31.4%

Key observations are as follows:

- Early revenue growth, led by rail: Prior to the fuel price increase (Weeks 6–9), bus fare revenue shows consistent modest growth, while rail revenue demonstrates strong increases from Week 7 onward, indicating stronger underlying demand and recovery in rail services.
- Sustained growth following fuel price increase: In the period immediately following the fuel price increase (Weeks 10–13), both bus and rail revenue continue to grow, with particularly strong gains in rail, suggesting increased public transport usage and/or improved yield during this period.
- Holiday-related disruption remains pronounced: As with patronage, the Easter and school holiday period significantly impacts revenue trends. This is most evident in Week 15, where bus revenue declines sharply (-48.2%) while rail revenue increases substantially (+68.7%), reflecting differing travel patterns and likely leisure-based demand.
- Strong recovery and stabilisation in later weeks: Following the holiday period, bus revenue rebounds strongly in Weeks 16 and 17 before stabilising, while rail revenue maintains consistent and strong growth through Weeks 18–20 (approximately 15–33%). This indicates a return to more stable demand and sustained strength in rail revenue performance.

### **Operator feedback**

Council has sought feedback from contracted operators regarding the impact of current fuel conditions on service delivery. At this stage, no operators have raised concerns or reported any issues affecting the delivery of services.

### **Customer Focus update**

As an update from WRCs Customer Focus team - initially, there was a suggestion from councillors to partner with Hamilton City Council (HCC) to run a collaborative promotion encouraging public transport as a cost-effective alternative to driving. However, after expressing concerns about the lack of clarity over public transport delivery responsibilities, HCC has now decided to step away from the joint approach.

In light of this, WRC staff are currently reworking the campaign with a broader regional focus. The strategy involves using WRC channels to build general awareness, while BUSIT and Te Huia platforms will deliver more targeted communications. By adapting our approach, we hope to encourage more people to consider public transport as a cost-effective transport alternative.