



**Submission
by the
Victoria University of Wellington
Students' Association
on the
GWRC Long-Term Plan 2021**

Prepared by

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VUWSA also wishes to make an oral submission.

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To	Greater Wellington Regional Council
From	Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
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Subject	Greater Wellington Regional Council Long-Term Plan
Contents	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introduction2. Public Transport3. Regional Parks4. Joint Committee5. Other Things6. Consultation Process7. Conclusion

1. Introduction

- Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) advocate for and represent the 22,000 students of Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington. Students live across the Greater Wellington region, from Masterton to Paraparaumu, from Island Bay to Te Aro, making us key stakeholders. The work of the Greater Wellington Regional Council, and the outcomes and implementation of this Long-Term Plan impact students in various ways, from our mental and physical health, to access to university, to our experiences of living in the Greater Wellington region.
- Many students suffer from climate anxiety, the feeling that the world as we know it is facing an avoidable, yet impending doom. Climate anxiety often creates feelings of futility and disenfranchisement. The knowledge that we are failing to preserve New Zealand's unique beauty is heart-breaking for students. However, the most effective and empowering change often comes from a local level. We believe bold and decisive climate action from Greater Wellington Regional Council will both help to reduce sensations of hopelessness in our young people and set an example on the national stage, further empowering students to fight for more effective climate action.
- For those reasons, we prefer option 1 on all three big issues to ensure we take effective action on climate change and mitigate its impacts on our region, personal lives, and future generations. We understand that this is more costly but it is important we invest in our communities and our future. We believe that central government needs to support councils much more through greater resourcing and financing. Central government has implemented goals for emission reductions and climate change mitigation and adaptation through the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill. They need to support the regions to meet these goals they have set.
- The Greater Wellington Regional Council must continue to improve outcomes for Mana Whenua and Māori, and put governance and decision-making powers into the hands of Māori. It must continue to honour and uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Incorporating Te Ao Māori and mātauranga Māori protocols is a step in the right

direction but the Greater Wellington Regional Council must go beyond tokenism and make space and give power to the hands of mana whenua and Māori.

2. Public Transport

- ② Public Transport is a significant equity and climate issue that students rely on. We prefer option 1: electric all the way. We believe the electrification of public transport is an important step in reducing emissions and paving the way for action on climate change. Central government needs to continue and improve upon the resource and financial support they provide to Greater Wellington Regional Council to help manage the cost of this essential electrification.
- ② As students, this is a step that is important to us. Firstly, it shows that the Greater Wellington Regional Council is taking serious action on climate change, instead of small tokenistic gestures. Secondly, we value looking after the environment and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Climate change disproportionately affects structurally oppressed communities, such as disabled people, people of colour, and lower socio-economic communities. It is key for generational wellbeing and equitable incomes to take steps that reduce the impact of climate change so the most oppressed communities do not have to bear the brunt of an issue that was not created by them.
- ② In the electrification of public transport there must also be a holistic approach taken. Whilst electrifying public transport is the right step, this will not be effective if people cannot use public transport because it is unaffordable, unreliable, and inaccessible. Public transport must be made more accessible, affordable, frequent, and be increased in capacity. The Greater Wellington Regional Council should provide free public transport for both full and part-time tertiary students for both on and off-peak hours to increase uptake and affordability of Public Transport. We would like to reaffirm that drivers should be paid a living wage, with their rights and wellbeing upheld and respected.

3. Regional Parks

- Our preferred option for the regional parks is option 1: sow the seeds now. The Greater Wellington Regional Council's climate change approach must acknowledge New Zealand's intersecting biodiversity crisis, simultaneously putting a strong focus on emissions reduction and restoration of native habitats. We must practice kaitiakitanga, preserving and restoring the whenua for future

generations. By reducing grazing on Council lands and restoring natural habitats as much and as soon as possible, we help to ensure the best possible future for students and their mokopuna.

- Physical interactions with the native bush are important for many students' hauora (wellbeing). Our mauri is derived from our environment. If our environment flourishes, so do we. Without our forests, wetlands, estuaries, and rivers, we are nothing. Although not all students regularly interact with the native bush, the mere knowledge that we are doing our best to restore New Zealand's native habitats is enough to enhance the mauri of many students at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington.
- Native forests are strong guarantors of long-term Carbon storage, able to store Carbon for hundreds of years. However, the impact of sequestration achieved through habitat restoration should not be overstated. Restoration of native habitats is incredibly important for the mauri of students and addressing our biodiversity crisis, but it needs to be paired with an aggressive approach in activities which produce emissions year on year, like transport and grazing.
- We believe the large-scale habitat restoration proposed has potential to be a strong source of employment for students. Many students struggle to find employment in Wellington which can reliably pay their rent. While habitat restoration may not always be viable as a source of employment for students, i.e., if it is located further out in the regions, we believe it has potential.

4. Joint Committee

- Our preferred option for the joint committee is option 1: serious support. We believe that a joint committee would help provide direction in solving the impending housing crisis, climate crisis and issues with transport. Working together with different territorial authorities would ultimately make a more profound and sustainable impact.
- It is especially important that the joint committee properly involves mana whenua, as Māori need to be uplifted and heard in these platforms. In order to make the joint committee more effective, its funding should be provided directly by the Greater Wellington Regional Council.

- Students need urgent and direct action on the climate and housing crises. This committee, with the right support, would be an effective way to address these crises as a collective.

5. Other things

- Covid-19: We believe the Wellington Covid recovery should be wellbeing-based. This means prioritising stable employment and finding economic solutions which prioritise and uplift our environment. Economic and climate recovery may often be linked, so we should readjust our way of thinking about economic recovery to reflect this.
- Wellington Regional Growth Fund: We believe the Council should prioritise provision of mid and high-density housing as the solution to our housing crisis. Increasing the quantity and quality of housing stock will have a massive effect on student wellbeing and housing affordability. This approach also ensures minimal encroachment on good farmland and green spaces surrounding the city. We also draw attention to the fact that unaffordable and unsafe housing acts as a barrier to education for many students, particularly for those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Let's Get Wellington Moving: We believe LGWM should focus on encouraging clean, affordable modes of transportation. Phasing out cars in favour of public transport, encouraging walking, and making cycling safer and more accessible will all have massive impacts on the wellbeing of students and our environment.

6. Consultation Process

- ☒ We believe young people should have the opportunity to engage with plans that affect their future. Council plans and policy documents are generally inaccessible due to how information is presented. However, the information in this document is generally easy to read, and has been laid out well, especially with the options proposed. The only issue is that the design of the document is not simple enough and makes it more difficult to read.
- ☒ We also appreciate the Greater Wellington Regional Council reaching out to us at VUWSA to aid us in our submission on the Long-Term Plan. However, because many submissions are happening at this time of year in both Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council, this leaves us little time to dedicate to each submission. In future, submissions should be spread out over a

longer period of time, and Wellington City Council and Greater Wellington Regional Council should coordinate better in both the planning of their submissions and the support they are giving to organisations that are under-resourced.

7. Conclusion

- ☒ This Long-Term Plan is a step in the right direction towards mitigating the climate crisis, creating equitable outcomes, and looking after our natural environment. However, these outcomes will only be achieved if the right options are chosen. We believe our selected options are the right ones to achieve effective and transformative action for our community, our environment, and our climate.
- ☒ In summary, we prefer:
 - i. Electrification of public transport all the way (Option 1).
 - ii. Sow the seeds now (Option 1).
 - iii. Serious support (Option 1).
- ☒ The Greater Wellington Regional Council must continue to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and uphold rightful governance and decision-making powers of mana whenua in order for the council to be true partners and achieve equitable outcomes.
- ☒ At the heart of all plans should be equitable outcomes, effective action on climate change, and the exercise of kaitiakitanga over our environment for ourselves and our mokopuna. This is a key plan for outcomes for students, and we hope the Greater Wellington Regional Council choose to take active and ambitious action to look after our student community at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington.