***The following comments are about the Annual Plan for Waikato Regional Council for the 2025/26 financial year.***

***It is proposed that Waikato District households will pay a rate to the Waikato Regional Council for public transport, but at a much-reduced cost than previously discussed.***

***Regional Councillor Noel Smith explains what it means– and I would appreciate your feedback.***

**Public Transport - Buses**

Last year the Regional council proposed options to fund public transport, and I came out strongly against those, because it would see some landowners (within 800m of a bus route) paying anywhere from several hundred dollars to $2,000 in a transport levy.

At that time, I raised my concerns widely across the Waikato District area through local community boards and committees; and I thank those committees, boards and individuals who submitted in opposition to the 2024 proposals.

I’m happy to say we threw that out, and the result will see a real difference in people’s pockets, being a fraction of the rate proposed last year.

What will this new proposal mean for you? For the Waikato District the rate splits into two zones, with Rangiriri as the proposed dividing line. Those living south of Rangiriri, with no bus service, will pay $33.58 per year, and those in the urban towns and villages, $67.10 (eg – Huntly, Ngaruawahia, Whatawhata, Raglan, Matangi and Tamahere. The map below is approximate and the detailed boundaries will be included in the consultation document issued early March.

North of Rangiriri the proposed yearly rate is $10.08 if you live in an unserviced area outside a town, village or urban zone, and $23.51 if you are in a township or another serviced area.

Last year ratepayers paid over $1m to Waikato District Council for public transport, and with the change to the Regional Council collecting a lower rate over a wider area, this should see a reduction for ratepayers on district council rates as they will no longer be charging for public transport bus services.

**2023/24 General Rate Surplus:**

Last financial year, the Regional Council had a $6.1 million surplus, and after using some of those funds for one-off costs, we still have a $4 million surplus. It’s important to me to represent the communities’ wishes and to do so, I’d like to know how best you think these funds should be applied (eg: biodiversity, civil defence, one off projects, used to offset rates or into a reserve etc to deal with unforeseen issues)?

I know ‘consultation’ is overwhelming, but this is a considerable amount of money. We’ve got a short summary document coming out for discussion during early March and I’d like to hear your thoughts, by way of a submission. It doesn’t need to be long or complex, just guidance on what ideas and thoughts you’d like me to put forward on your behalf. You can find the document at [www.waikatoregion.govt.nz](http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz) once it is published (soon). Please note that the document has other consultation points however I see the above two issues as being significant due to the impact on the proposed rates increase.

The overall rates increase is proposed at 5.9% with around half of that coming from the new bus rates. I would be grateful if you would let Council know what you think of the proposals, as many of you did last year.

As always, I’m happy to be contacted: noel.smith@waikatoregion@govt.nz or 021 240 7921.

I am also happy to come to any meeting to discuss the Annual Plan or any other concern/s you may have.

As I have been asked by many of you I can say that I have enjoyed my term on the Regional Council and intend to stand again for the Waikato Regional Council’s Waikato constituency again in the October elections.

Regards

Noel

**Table 1 – Proposed rating – see map on next page for the proposed rating zones**



