

21 October 2020

## Submission on Greater Wellington Regional Council Draft Toitū Te Whenua Parks Network Plan 2020-30

### Introduction

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hiko Aotearoa is the Crown agent responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues.

Our role is to provide New Zealanders with free, certain, enduring, and practical access to the outdoors.

We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help to resolve access disputes and negotiate new access.

The Commission has a team in Wellington and a network of regional field advisors. An independent board governs our work. Our governing piece of legislation is the *Walking Access Act 2008*.

Much of our work focuses on active transport. We support the development, enhancement, protection and promotion of walking, cycling both for recreation and for commuting to local destinations such as schools, places of work and shops.

### Support for the draft Parks Network plan

We note the Greater Wellington Regional Council's draft Parks Network plan 2020-30 will replace its current Parks Network plan when it is adopted.

We support the draft plan's broad approach to consider not just the land and environment, but the tracks and trails and how people connect to the diverse landscapes and environment within the Wellington Regional Council's Parks network.

We endorse the Parks Network plan. We lend our support to the following priorities within it:

- [Key destinations 2.2.3] Development, enhancement and protection of key destination regional trails. The Commission acknowledges the Regional Council's continued commitment to providing and protecting high value, high quality trails assets in our region. The Commission further supports the need to create enduring access protection for key regional trails. A prime example of this protecting key regional trails was highlighted through access easements within the Belmont Regional park providing enduring protection from the transmission gully project ensuring re-establishment of access would be a requirement of the roading project.
- [Trails 2.2.5] Developing a diverse network of shared trails for walkers, runners, cyclists, horse riders, mountain bikers, e-bikers, mobility scooters and many other groups can all share the regions trails space safely. Ensure that careful and appropriate development of trails access is provided to the many diverse groups in our community to share in the amazing environmental and recreational spaces available in our region. The aim to support a track network appropriate to the place, community and user group needs.

- [2.2.5 connected regional trail network] focusing on further building partnership working collectively with key partners and stakeholders. The Commission support the need to continue building good strategic partnership with regional stakeholders. The Commission look forward to further developing this working relationship, particularly in terms of the Regional Trails Framework. Working in partnership with mana whenua, local and regional councils to improve connectivity within our region.

### Other matters – equity of access

A significant benefit of public access to the outdoors, including through regional parks, is that it is free for all users. Unlike traditional sport and many other forms of recreation, walking in the outdoors carries little cost to the user.

We urge Greater Wellington Regional Council to ensure that this free access to the outdoors through regional parks is available for all Wellingtonians, including those without private motor vehicles. This will include consideration of regional park access in public transport planning and working with territorial authorities and the NZ Transport Agency to ensure quality walking and cycling access to regional parks from nearby population centres.

We also urge Greater Wellington Regional Council to improve the provision of wheelchair- and pram-friendly trails, including associated facilities (such as accessible parking and toilets), as this group of users often misses out on outdoor access opportunities.

### Recommendations

The Commission recommends the Regional Council continues to protect significant key destination trails by creating enduring access easements. We recommend the Commission to provide support to the Greater Wellington Regional Council to work through the legal and survey requirements to protect key regional assets.

The Commission also recommends the Regional Council focus on equity of access, ensuring that all Wellingtonians can access its parks through public and active transport modes, in addition to private motor vehicles, and that people with wheelchairs and/or prams can access local trails in nature with appropriate associated infrastructure.

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