

**PAMELA MAXWELL FRENCH AND JOHN GIBSON FRENCH (#701)**

**NOTIFIED PROPOSED DISTRICT PLAN VARIATION TO QLDC URBAN INTENSIFICATION**

**CHAPTER NINE – HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL ZONE**

**FURTHER SUBMISSION DATED 4 JULY 2025**

1. We reiterate the contents of our submissions dated 3 October and 2023 and 11 June 2024.
2. Since then, the Queenstown situation has deteriorated as a result of the factual circumstances we identified in earlier submissions.
3. This proposed urban intensification variation will inevitably exacerbate the damage caused to Queenstown and surrounding “township”. This is a result of the continuous over-development and increased population.
4. As the **attached** recent newspaper articles and letters record serious problems of the following nature continue, and should be stopped:
  - 4.1 Traffic and parking congestion
  - 4.2 Damage to the environment in general terms
  - 4.3 Damage to the quality of life
  - 4.4 Damage to Queenstown’s reputation
  - 4.5 A resulting inability to properly provide its infrastructure such as water
5. The urban intensification will solve none of the accommodation problems. The values and the rents will be too high. Damage to the environment as outlined in this submission will be irreparable.



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P.M. FRENCH



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J.G. FRENCH

Date: 4 July 2025

# Frankton Rd tram plan

Public transport expert proposes electric tram from Fernhill to Frankton

AN expert in public transport believes Queenstown's chronic traffic congestion — on Frankton Rd, in particular — can be solved by a modern electric tram carrying up to 200 passengers.

Chris Harris proposes the tram along part or all of the Number 1 bus route between Remarkables Park and the

**Exclusive**

**PHILIP CHANDLER**

airport, at one end and Fernhill Rd, at the other end.

Importantly, it would have “absolute priority” along

Frankton Rd with ‘filter lights’ at both ends — the BP roundabout that’s in the process of being replaced with a large signalised intersection and the Melbourne St arterial road intersection with Frankton Rd.

Other traffic, including buses, would still use Frankton Rd, but the AI-controlled

filter lights would ensure the road was never clogged, Harris says.

He notes other public transport options have been proposed as solutions, including gondolas over Queenstown Hill, but says “a congestion-free Frankton Rd is the key strategic benefit not shared by the other proposals that have

been raised so far”.

With a background in engineering and urban planning, Harris has lived in Queenstown since 2017.

Prior to that he was involved with transport at Auckland's former North Shore City Council for about 10 years.

CONTINUED PAGE 2



# Tramway cost estimated at \$100m, plus trams

FROM PAGE 1

He also co-founded the Campaign for Public Transport, now known as Greater Auckland.

He says he's worked for many years "in the big-city public transport space on issues increasingly faced by Queenstown".

"Queenstown might normally be thought too small to have a tramway, and this is probably one reason why a tramway has not been proposed.

"However, as New Zealand's tourism capital, hosting dozens of international visitors annually per resident, Queenstown is a special case."

With a low floor and spacious interior, Harris says a tram's far more appealing for airport passengers and hotel guests to roll their suitcase on and off than lugging it on to a bus with little space for luggage.



**'Only option reducing congestion':**  
Tram proponent Chris Harris

In terms of the 18km route from east to west — though it'd also operate in the other direction — he suggests it start with a dedicated right-of-way from Remarkables Park to the airport, then along Kawarau Rd, west of the runway, to the planned Frankton transport interchange.

At the CBD end, instead of taking the Melbourne St arterial, he proposes it go down Frankton

Rd and then along Coronation Dr to Stanley St, thus avoiding the steep part of Stanley St.

Harris proposes it then go along a possibly repaved Shotover St, with its traffic lights partly or entirely removed, then Lake Esplanade.

On Fernhill Rd, it might finish by the Heritage Hotel, avoiding a steeper stretch, though he says there's the technology to power it up.

Because buses would still serve the route, he says they or hotel shuttles could take people further on.

The tram might also only stop once on Frankton Rd, so existing bus stops could remain, he adds.

Harris says modern track-laying technologies mean you don't need the disruption of having to dig up roads to lay tracks.

For example, with the LR55 system used in Sheffield, England,

since the '90s, "tram tracks are laid in twin grooves in an existing asphalt roadway".

The tram, Harris adds, could complement other transport modes which could act as feeders, such as gondolas bringing people down from hilly suburbs.

In Portland, Oregon, in the United States, he points out there are several on-road tramlines plus a gondola serving a hilly part of the city.

He estimates the tramway, excluding trams, would cost about \$100 million if the track is laid directly in the roadway — "that is a much cheaper option than digging up the road entirely".

He adds the running costs of electric trams are also quite low — "the costs are nearly all upfront, and once a town or city has taken the plunge, the system is very economic".



# IN BRIEF

## Fast-track all go

THE Fast-track Approvals Bill passed its third reading on Tuesday, meaning applications for projects to be considered under the new regime will be accepted from February 7. In Queenstown, projects include Homestead Bay (2800 residential units), Coronet Village, which includes a new gondola providing access to the Coronet Peak ski area, a boarding high school, primary school, up to 780 residential units and a mountain biking facility, Silver Creek's 1050 dwelling units, Gibbston Village's 900 dwelling units and a primary school, and Flint's Park's 501 residential dwellings, at Ladies Mile.

## Parking relief

QUEENSTOWN'S council's opening its temp-

orary Stanley St carpark tomorrow, providing about 54 spaces to use till after Waitangi weekend — the pay-and-display park will cost \$3.10 per hour. Meantime there are still 102 spaces off Hay St, at the Lakeview carpark, which costs \$2.10 an hour, while temporary free parking will be available at Queenstown Primary School, on Robins Rd, from Saturday till January 26.

## Median wage criticism

UNITE Union Queenstown-based regional organiser Simon Edmunds is critical of the government removing, from March, median wage requirements for Accredited Employer Work Visa employees. Immigration Minister Erica Stanford says "it distorted wages and in some cases resulted in businesses paying migrant workers more than New Zealanders doing the same job". Edmunds says it will drive down wages in a town where it's hard to afford to live.



# Turbocharging Q'town's lake

AN American Silicon Valley entrepreneur who calls Queenstown his second home is determined to bring more life to Lake Wakatipu — for both commuting and watersports.

Iraj Barabi, who developed the Queenstown Marina, takes over Queenstown Bay's Convelle Wharf, Queenstown Ferries and Queenstown Jet Boat (formerly Thunder Jet) from tourism giant RealNZ next Thursday.

He's also bought Queenstown Paraflights, Queenstown Boat Charters and another venture, which he'll announce soon, under umbrella company, Watersports Ltd.

And he's bought Jarrod Johnston's Queenstown Marine to service the marina and his boat owners.

What Barabi calls his "acquisition binge" serves two purposes, he says.

First, he's out to relieve Queenstown's chronic traffic congestion "by diverting a significant portion to the lake".

"Is it not clear that the topography of the area and the roads



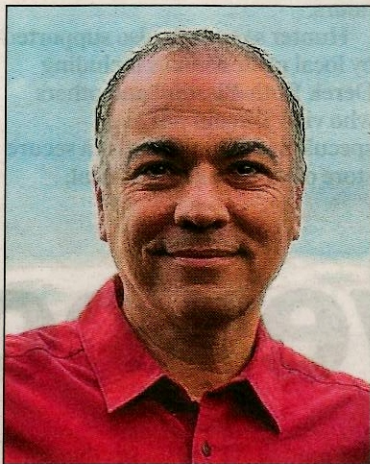
**Relieving road congestion:** Iraj Barabi hopes to expand Queenstown Ferries' water taxi service to relieve traffic congestion

cannot possibly handle the growth, no matter how many traffic lights and roundabouts are built?

"The solution is obvious — the lake is the answer."

Barabi says he's negotiating with Otago Regional Council, which provides a subsidy, to expand the frequency and breadth of Queenstown Ferries' water taxi business.

He's also talking to the devel-



**On an 'acquisition binge':** Iraj Barabi

opers of Jack's Point and Hanley's Farm about providing a new service for their residents, and those who'll live in Homestead Bay.

Shotover Country's also in his sights, though access via the Kawarau River will be more challenging, he says, but he's been evaluating different types of boats, such as electric and hydrofoil, both in New Zealand and abroad.

Barabi's also keen to complement a scheduled service, using bigger boats, with an on-demand option — "something like Uber taxi boats".

His second initiative, complementing Queenstown's reputation as the world's adventure capital, is for it also be known as "the watersports capital".

"We will do this by improving and expanding the activities the public will be able to enjoy."

This includes a new product, which has just arrived in NZ and will debut here mid-year.

Coming from Idaho, where he has a lakefront home, Barabi says he was surprised how little lake life Queenstown has when he first arrived.

"Such a lake in the United States would be full of boats, pontoon boats, houseboats, ski boats, float planes and all that — we think this lake really is not being utilised."

Meanwhile, Barabi says though he and his sisters paid almost \$15.5 million for Queenstown's Brecon St mini-golf course, he's satisfied to keep it.

"Finance is not my primary goal — I've done that.

"Right now I want to do things that give me satisfaction."

He's also looking forward to Tim McMahon's hot pools complex he's building on his land beside the mini golf.

Barabi's also dusting off plans the late Kevin Carlin had for an escalator beside the Brecon St stairs to improve pedestrian access to Brecon St activities, including Skyline's gondola, for particularly children, older adults and the physically impaired.

"Some people that want to get to Skyline take their cars instead of climbing those stairs, so we want to actually see if we can realise that."

Summing up his rapidly-escalating involvement with the resort, he says "I love Queenstown and I want to put, like, a positive mark in town".

Meanwhile, he's also excited Queenstown will be hosting the NZ Marina Operators Association's annual conference in September.



# Q'town plea to avoid gridlock

TRACEY ROXBURGH

STARK warnings about looming gridlock in Queenstown have sparked pleas for urgent investment in public transport.

The 14km drive from the outskirts of town to the CBD is forecast to take an hour at peak times within the next three years.

In its submission on the Otago Regional Council's (ORC) draft regional public transport plan — focused on the next 10 years — the Queenstown Lakes District Council (QLDC) said rapid growth in the district was putting “significant pressure” on the transport network.

And unless people stopped using private vehicles, it would only get worse.

“If significant mode shift away from single-occupancy vehicles is not achieved, much of the transport network will reach gridlock,” the QLDC submission said.

“By 2028, it is predicted that peak travel periods on State Highway 6A will be regularly gridlocked at morning and afternoon peak hours with car and public transport travel times between Lake Hayes Estate and Queenstown exceeding 60 minutes.

“This projected gridlock will have a significant negative impact on the economic productivity of the district, liveability for residents, and the visitor experience.”

At present, the average daily population was about 70,205 and the peak daily population was 99,220 — by 2053, those figures were expected to more than double, to 150,082 and 217,462, respectively.

Congestion was exacerbated because rapid development was outpacing the Wakatipu network's capacity, and geographic limitations made expanding the roading network difficult.

“Accordingly, the network must be utilised more efficiently ... If significant mode shift away

from single-occupancy vehicles is not achieved, much of the transport network will reach gridlock.”

While the ORC, QLDC and Central Otago District Council had partnered to apply to central government for a regional deal, which included a proposal for mass rapid transit, further investment in key public transport routes and destinations in Queenstown was required “due to the finite capacity of the roading network”.

In particular, the council said detailed business planning for public transport to service the Te Pūtahi Ladies Mile development, which envisaged another 2400 residential units, was an “urgent priority” — failure to progress that would have “serious implications”, including the delay of the development, the submission said.

While it welcomed aspirations for a potential new ferry service, from Queenstown to Homestead Bay, where another 2800 homes are planned, in “6-30 years”, it did not support removing planned improvements to the existing ferry service, operating between Queenstown Bay and Frankton Arm, in the ORC's proposed draft annual plan.

Government co-funding had been reduced, meaning there was \$4.6 million less than needed for planned upgrades across Otago.

Rather than ratepayers bearing the full costs, improvement plans, including the expanded ferry service, had been pared back.

But the district council's submission said it was a “missed opportunity” to address Queenstown's congestion challenges in growth locations, such as to and from Jack's Point/Hanley's Farm to the Queenstown CBD, and encouraged the ORC to “prioritise moving the planned date of those ferry services forward”.



which services Southland. However, by yesterday and after

## Plea to avoid gridlock in Q'town

From Page 1

QLDC also expressed support for the Wānaka public transport business case — a recent addition to the ORC's draft long-term plan.

Over two trials, in 2022 and 2023, more than 1300 rides were recorded, contributing to a reduction of almost 49,000km in light vehicle travel, QLDC said.

The district council said it was “crucial” Upper Clutha public transport services were prioritised, and sought for that to start in year four of the long-term plan.

Regarding a proposal to increase the base fare for adult passengers by 25%, to \$2.50, the district council “strongly encourages” ORC to try to retain the \$2 fare and noted there was “an opportunity with upcoming

Quiz

| Continued Page 2

BEGINNER (1 of 1)



4/2/25 ODT

# Meaningful debate on future tourism needed

RE the letter from Frances Anderson (ODT 28.1.25) and your editorial the following day. It is essential there is meaningful debate on tourism rather than the Trumpian pronouncements of growth to save us.

Your readers may recall discussion when Covid hit that it was an opportunity to re-set New Zealand's approach to tourism. The pressures on places such as Queenstown, Rotorua and the Bay of Islands was distracting from the experience of visitors, both domestic and international.

Too many people and vehicles are not the uncrowded New Zealand many visitors want to experience.

The re-set has been forgotten. Implied at the time was lowering the peak numbers of visitors and improved infrastructure, in the broadest sense. More visitors spread geographically and seasonally would benefit all.

The pressure on government to provide enough Department of Conservation resources and border management was also part of the discussion. We need to protect what we now offer for future generations and visitors.

The present government is lauding the value of increasing tourism, but this must be based on good research and then investment in the places

under greatest pressure.

Tourism is best served by us providing a quality experience not attempting to make the same mistakes of other countries with mindless growth.

We already have a visitor levy, so funding is available for judicious application adding to our reputation for stunning beauty, incredible cuisine and engaging people with a fascinating culture and history.

**Phil Dowsett**

Kew

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**BIBLE READING:** I the Lord speak the truth; I declare what is right. — Isaiah 45:19.

# 'Insane' growth means a catch-22 for Q'town

YOUR lead article in the ODT (2,6.25) on "pending gridlock" shows how Queenstown is stuck in a catch-22 situation.

It does not have the rating base to pay for the sort of expenditure required to give any sort of fix to the diabolical commuting situation that currently exists, and the Queenstown Lakes District Council continues to pursue the ridiculous and unsustainable growth pattern that has caused the current situation.

Water taxis are not the answer as Lake Wakatipu can get too rough for these to operate consistently. Neither are buses the answer, as locals won't use them, even with cheap fares.

Multi-millions of dollars are also required to fix the failing Queenstown sewage treatment plant's effluent problems.

Unless QLDC stops the region's insane growth, things can only get worse. Given the way QLDC seems to work, I think Queenstown is stuffed.

**Gavin Dann**  
Alexandra

sewage disposal scheme in Queenstown (and now Hāwea) is not coping and making the current traffic problems even worse, we are now told gridlock is looming.

The answer, I think, is obvious. Stop recklessly issuing resource consents allowing developers to keep building huge or any housing estates.

Is it not time to take several steps back and try to service what you already have rather than create new infrastructure problems? If consenting such housing projects is not causing the problems, I would be keen to know what is.

Maybe you should spare a thought for the landscape while you're at it. It is so sad to see what used to be a scenic entrance to the town, reduced to massive shopping malls and featureless, look-alike housing which just keeps expanding.

The prospect of 2400 more residential units on Ladies Mile is too awful to dwell on.

**Louise Joyce**  
Earnscliffe



In a jam . . . Heavy traffic on Kawarau Rd, State Highway 6, between Queenstown Airport and the Frankton roundabout.

PHOTO: ODT FILES

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# REGIONS

QUEENSTOWN

## Predicted traffic 'crisis' has councillors worried

TRACEY ROXBURGH

THE Wakatipu will face "a crisis" as failure looms for a key part of the region's roading network, a Queenstown Lakes District councillor said yesterday.

Some grim predictions were made on the future state of traffic on the southern corridor during a council planning and strategy meeting yesterday.

Cr Quentin Smith, of Wānaka, asked for impending issues with the southern corridor to be given "the highest level of alert" to the council's partners, including NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA).



Quentin Smith

which has been progressed over the past year — strategic growth manager Anita Vanstone said the two-lane Kawarau Bridge, which opened in 2016, was fast approaching its capacity of 1500 vehicles per hour, per lane.

"If we were to have a traffic light system ... this would be a flashing red light, with a siren on top of it," he said.

In an update to the committee on the Te Tapuae south-

ern corridor structure plan — at present, peak demand was about 1200 vehicles an hour; the difference was the equivalent to between 600 and 900 additional residential units in the southern corridor, which stretches from Kelvin Heights to Kingston.

Existing and approved residential developments included Hanley's Farm, Jack's Point, Park Ridge (previously known as Coneburn) and an extension to the Kingston township.

"Under the existing travel behaviour profile, the Kawarau Bridge will not be able to accommodate demand generated by the existing zoned development," Ms Vanstone's report warned.

That raised concerns about future developments, including those potentially going through the government's new Fast-track Approvals Bill.

Modelling indicated there would be "gridlock" at peak periods, and travel times from the Queenstown CBD to, for example, the southern corridor would exceed 60 minutes, compared to today's 15-20 minutes.

The public transport business case required "highly optimistic" mode-share percentages — between 49% and 53% — to maintain the operation of the bridge, which would be "remarkable" for an urban area

bus network, the report said.

That business case also identified a demand, by 2033-39, for the Jack's Point to Queenstown bus to operate every 15 minutes until midnight, and every 30 minutes from midnight until 2am, using buses with capacity for 110 passengers each.

A second bridge was being investigated, to help alleviate congestion, though there were "significant concerns" about what that would do to the rest of the network, the financial implications, geotechnical concerns and overall capacities it would unlock.

NZTA had also not given any funding commitment on it.

Minutes from a transport workshop in May show a gondola system was also being considered, which could link the southern corridor to Remarkables Park, Queenstown Airport and the Frankton bus hub.

However, the State Highway 6 corridor was deemed "unsuitable" due to conflict with NZTA design, functionality and safety requirements, and NZTA had also not committed any funding.

While the committee was asked to note the contents of the report, Cr Smith said the infrastructure deficit, particularly in transport, had reached "a critical level".

"NZTA have walked away

from this as well.

"We're admitting that we're facing a network failure in two years, and we've got no answer ... [and] no investment."

Cr Smith noted investment in the southern corridor was only scheduled from year 7 of the 10-year plan.

"If we see the wall coming, we can't just go, 'yep, it's coming'.

"I think we need to use the strongest possible words to say ... this is a crisis.

"How do we alert our partners, in the strongest possible terms, to say, 'look, we're in real trouble here if we don't come up with a solution'?"

tracey.roxburgh@odt.co.nz



# Growing pains may rile, QLDC warned

■ TESS BRUNTON

QUEENSTOWN has been suffering from growing pains for years, but with visitor and resident numbers continuing to swell it is turning into a full-blown belly ache.

The Queenstown Lakes population is about 52,000 people, but that swells to about 120,000 over peak summer.

It has added pressure to infrastructure, traffic congestion and caused local frustration when freedom campers used streets as toilets and rubbish pits.

As the government pushes for more tourist arrivals, residents have been speaking about the challenges facing their town and what is on the horizon.

Earlier this year, Queenstown Lakes District councillors were warned that urgent intervention was needed to prevent local hostility over increasing tourist pressures as part of a regional deal proposal that aimed to address the region's critical needs.

Among the challenges, it found the 11km trip between Lake Hayes and central Queenstown could regularly exceed an hour if nothing was done, due to traffic congestion.

iFly Queenstown owner and local councillor Matt Wong said tourism had a part to play in the problem and the solution, but issues like traffic congestion and infrastructure pressures did not go away during the quieter months.

"The analogy we always use with traffic, for example, is you're not stuck in traffic, you are the traffic."

The council and government needed to investigate different ways to help fund more infrastructure, including user pays or a visitor levy, he said.

"Growth doesn't pay for

growth. We've had a lot more development obviously as a region than most other districts and that growth has not really paid for itself."

One long-term resident said the area had a lot of growing pains.

The district needed more affordable housing but it seemed like they were getting more second houses for overseas buyers, he said.

"We've got a problem and the problem is overtourism and overdevelopment. We aren't thinking about quality, we're only thinking about quantity."

Ten years ago, Infometrics figures show the Queenstown Lakes population was about 33,400, and it has grown by about 19,000 people since then.

In the regional deal proposal, Queenstown Lakes' population was projected to reach 100,558 by 2053.

Queenstown Lakes Mayor Glyn Lewers said community frustrations with tourism were likely a hangover from underinvestment.

The council was investing \$470 million to improve infrastructure including drinking water and wastewater for the expected tourism growth, he said.

"But I'll acknowledge \$470m is not enough. That is just for us to get by and probably with a diminishing visitor experience. That's the best we can do without burdening the ratepayer even more," he said.

Before the government announced it wanted to welcome more tourists, Queenstown was predicting 7.1% annual growth in tourism over the next five years.

"Over the next 10 years, just under \$1 billion worth of capital expenditure is to accommodate expected growth, not to create growth, just the expected growth. That's 40% of our capital expenditure." — RNZ



# Solutions for Q'town wastewater woes

Councils need to work together on wastewater issues, **Selva Selvarajah** writes.

**Q**UEENSTOWN and its surrounding towns are well-known for their scenic beauty, locally and globally.

Regardless of the season, the Queenstown-Lakes district is a tourist mecca with an estimated 60,000-70,000 tourists per day. It is also a developers' and investors' paradise: it is one of the fastest growing regions in New Zealand and its current population of 50,000 was unthinkable in 2001, when it was 17,850. At this rate of growth, there is no doubt it will outgrow Dunedin in the coming years.

As it experiences such unprecedented growth, growing pains are inevitable. Long-term planning for the district is not just providing for housing, commercial opportunities, roading and Three Waters.

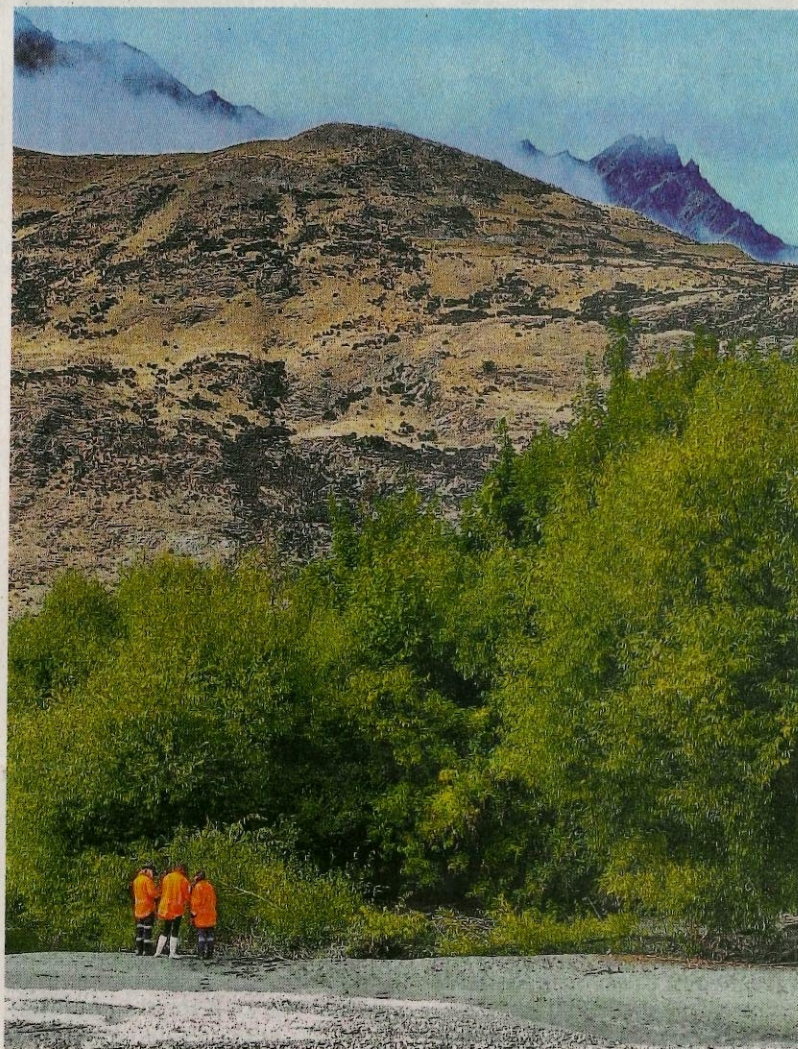
Fast-growing towns with enormous potential must endure sensible, painful and radical changes to strategically position and grow their key infrastructures, in order to avoid sustained and long-term pains.

It goes without saying within the past decade, Queenstown wastewater treatment and discharge issues have already exceeded the acute and chronic pain thresholds for the district, region and its people.

The "pain source" in question is in full view for the tourists entering Queenstown, just past the Shotover Bridge, the gateway to Queenstown from the north — not a warm welcome to one of the most special and attractive places on earth.

Despite the multimillion-dollar wastewater treatment plant upgrade, the stubborn ponds, which have been in existence since the 1970s, are still in view of the tourists and treating 20% of the raw wastewater.

Apparently, the community is stuck with ponds forever, because there is a council plan to upgrade and retain it as a



**Troubled waters ... Queenstown Lakes District Council staff and contractors watch treated effluent from the Shotover Wastewater Treatment Plant flow along a newly cleared channel into the Shotover River.**

PHOTO: GUY WILLIAMS

"calamity pond".

The above step clearly signals more failures of the upgraded treatment plant and the lack of confidence by the district council in the upgraded system, which is hardly comforting to the ratepayers.

The Queenstown treatment pond discharge to Shotover River predated the Kawarau Water Conservation Order in 1997 under the Resource Management Act (RMA).

The order recognised the Dart, Rees, Shotover and Kawarau Rivers, among other rivers in the Wakatipu catchment and Lake Wakatipu itself, as having outstanding amenity and intrinsic values which deserved protection.

While the order provided

exemptions for lawful discharges which existed at the time, they were not in perpetuity, since re-permitting must be at the discretion of the regional council.

Judging by what the district council has been enduring in the past decade and in hindsight, ideally the entire Shotover wastewater treatment plant should have been decommissioned and relocated from the current location to a new site fitted with a newly built modern treatment plant.

Is it still too late, given more upgrades are planned at a cost of \$70 million while the already upgraded plant has been performing poorly?

The above cost is in addition to the recent estimates of

\$40m-\$200m on future land disposal options.

The most expensive land disposal option has been discharging in and around the airport, but fear of bird strikes became an issue, which triggered the local council to evoke emergency discharge under the RMA.

The other option is to discharge to a kilometre-long constructed wetland within the Shotover Delta. My extensive study of such wetlands indicates they are a proven-failed system to treat wastewater.

The remaining land discharge options indicate relocating the discharge to Frankton Flats with bore or soak-hole discharges at \$70m.

As the Wakatipu Basin, Arrowtown, Hayes, Jacks Point, Hanley Farm and Ladies Miles continue to grow, which requires further sewerage reticulation, why convey sewage wastewater to Shotover Delta, treat and pipe back to Frankton Flats? Why not relocate the entire plant and the discharge to a new remote location, well away from the costly and busy Frankton Flats?

There is a lot of misinformation on the catchment in question.

The *E. coli* requirement for Shotover and Kawarau Rivers under the National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management 2020 is median 130 *E. coli* per 100ml, not 540 *E. coli* per 100ml, which is only allowed in 5% of the water samples.

Typically, in such rivers, background faecal bacteria levels are only elevated 5%-10% of the time.

Judging by the district council's own April 2025 upstream water quality tests for the Shotover and Kawarau Rivers, they had 19-20 and 17-57 *E. coli* per 100ml, respectively.

Council web information such as "... approximately there are 200 facilities discharging to water ..." and information comparing the daily discharge volume to river flows with Olympic size swimming pools is neither comforting nor useful, since such messages imply the district and its unique RMA-protected headwaters environment must be treated like the polluted or non-

headwaters catchments in the country.

The combined treatment by the unreliable ponds and the inconsistently performing new activated sludge plant, and the resulting discharge quality or quantity, will not be consistent for the regional council to grant an interim consent under conditions, let alone monitor for compliance.

Even if the regional authority could complete the consent process, the environmental outcomes might remain unchanged, despite wasting the community's money on consultants and the hearing commissioners on a publicly notified consent.

If so, what is the way out?

The best way forward for both councils, which represent the same ratepayers, is to collectively consider a cost-effective and outcome-based solution.

One such solution is for the district council to withdraw the application and the regional council to serve an abatement notice to enable the district council to find an alternative solution to the current emergency discharge within a mutually agreed and realistic timeframe.

The realistic solutions are netting the disposal area to avoid birds or using bird-scaring devices or converting the existing disposal area into an overland flow system without wastewater ponding.

The regional council has been extremely patient in its regulatory actions to date.

Regulatory actions are effective if they result in desired outcomes for our community or the environment.

The best outcome for the ratepayers is both councils working collaboratively for a cost effective short- to medium-term solution and proactively engaging on long-term solutions, including a well-planned staged removal of the wastewater treatment plant from the current site to a well-investigated and suitable long-term site.

■ **Dr Selva Selvarajah** is a consultant specialising in wastewater, water quality and the RMA.



# Call to pause new connections to plant

**MATTHEW LITTLEWOOD**

NEW connections to Queenstown's troubled Shotover wastewater treatment plant should be paused until issues with its disposal system can be addressed, the deputy mayor says.

Queenstown Lakes District deputy mayor Quentin Smith's comments come as concerns mount the plant could be discharging contaminants into the nearby Shotover or Kawarau Rivers.

However, yesterday Mr Smith said there had been some confusion among the public as to the precise issues with the treatment plant.

"I think there's some confusion around what's the plant and what's the disposal field.

"I think it's important to realise that the plant is not so much the problem."

Once the effluent was treated by the plant, it had to be disposed of, and "that's where we're running into the issues".

"It's supposed to be soaked into the ground [in the disposal field] and drained away, and that just isn't working for a range of reasons.

"That's what's causing the issues with the discharges."

The Otago Regional Council revealed this week it had issued the Queenstown Lakes District Council 10 infringement notices due to incidents at the plant last year related to the alleged improper discharge of contaminants.

The ORC has been tight-lipped about the matter — say-

ing information it holds could potentially become evidence in a possible prosecution.

Mr Smith addressed concerns raised by ORC councillors Alexa Forbes and Michael Laws, who have questioned whether the treatment plant was "broken" and that the QLDC had been prioritising development over ensuring the infrastructure was capable to manage it.

"I think that there is clearly an issue with the disposal field, and we don't have an answer to that in the immediate future," Mr Smith said.

"I do think we need to seriously consider a suspension or moratorium on further connection to that scheme until we get that resolved."

There was "no question" there was potential across all sectors,

including water, wastewater and transport, "for demand to get ahead of infrastructure".

"It is definitely real for us, and we need to make sure we're keeping up with the infrastructure demand for sure."

In a statement yesterday, the QLDC said it had allocated \$77.5 million through its present long-term plan to develop and implement a new disposal strategy for the Shotover wastewater treatment plant.

"This project is under way, commencing with an assessment of options and working towards identification of a preferred disposal solution," a spokesman said.

"Any new solution will require a new discharge consent to be obtained and it is anticipated that an alternative disposal

approach will take some years to implement.

"That is the reality of delivering infrastructure projects in New Zealand, and is a challenge being met by local authorities across the country."

Queenstown Lakes District Mayor Glyn Lewers acknowledged a solution would take "quite a while — and that's the most frustrating thing".

"We're in an alpine environment, and as a result we're held to higher standards than other councils — and that's to be expected."

Cr Laws said the whole situation was a shambles and "non-sense".

"If one wanted a satire on local government in New Zealand, then you'd look no further than this debacle.

"And until we in governance get a full explanation as to what's right and what's wrong — from those ORC staff charged with overseeing the [wastewater treatment plant] — I will not be satisfied."

Cr Forbes said the pace of development in Queenstown, and what that meant for the capacity of the disposal field, was a "real concern".

"While it's good that the council has set aside a lot of money to address the issue, I would like to see some long-term thinking about the disposal field, and what their process is going to be.

"Queenstown has a lot of upcoming development on its books, and there's a question whether it can sustain the extra connections."

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# Faeces, rubbish, unwanted gear paint damning picture

VAUGHAN ELDER

PHOTOS showing human faeces and piles of rubbish on Queenstown's lake shore paint a damning picture as the council prepares to crack down on freedom camping.

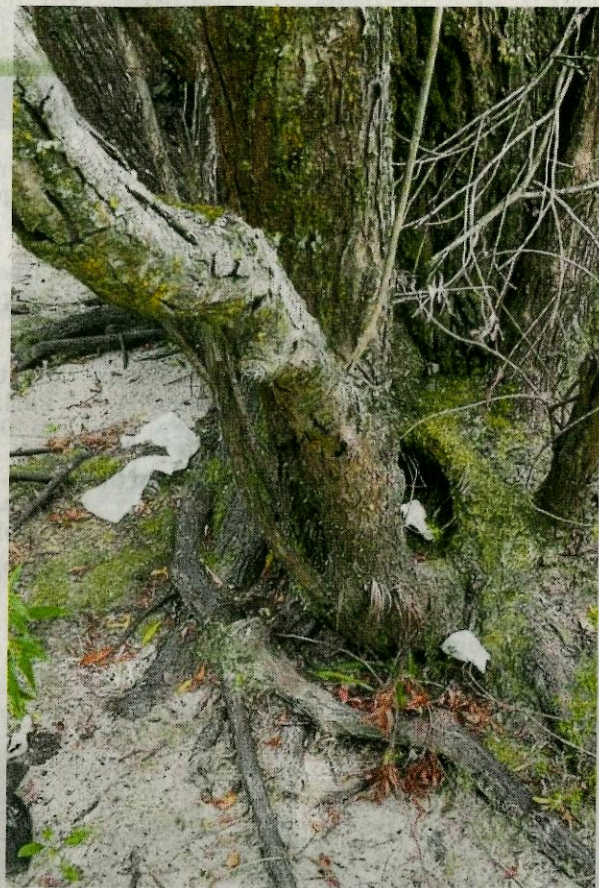
Queenstown Lakes District councillors will today vote on whether to push forward with a new freedom camping bylaw after the old one was ruled invalid by the High Court last year.

A report prepared by council staff said a rise in freedom campers, along with the lack of enforcement options due to the lack of bylaw, made it challenging for the council to tackle the growing problem.

Councillors will be confronted with photos taken by staff showing a range of the worst freedom camping behaviour, which includes widespread dumping of rubbish, human faeces and abandoned camping equipment.

The council-employed "summer ambassadors" also noted anti-social behaviour, drinking in alcohol-free zones, washing in Lake Wakatipu and issues with over-capacity.

Staff said in the three months to the end of January, there had been a "concerning" number of freedom campers caught breaching national rules, and 217 infringement notices



Rubbish . . . Toilet paper left by the Clutha River/Mata-au at Luggate Red Bridge freedom camping area. Right: Full bins attract further dumping of rubbish at Kingston Lakefront freedom camping area. PHOTOS: QLDC



issued.

The most common infringement — with a total of 171 notices issued — was tourists being caught freedom camping

in non-self contained vehicles.

Staff warned councillors in the report action was needed amid growing dissatisfaction among Queenstown Lakes resi-

dents about the impact tourism was having on their communities.

"Officers consider that freedom camping presents an

important issue to the district's social, economic, cultural and environmental wellbeing. QLDC has a responsibility to manage freedom camping.

"Left unmanaged, it is likely that a wide range of adverse effects will be experienced, creating tension and dissatisfaction for residents and visitors alike."

Staff said the best way to address the issue was by developing a new bylaw which would make it easy for staff to fine freedom campers who did not comply with it.

Along with the bylaw the council should also educate tourists to promote best practise camping behaviour.

The discussion at today's council meeting comes after a High Court ruling, handed down last year, ruled Queenstown council's 2021 Freedom Camping Bylaw was invalid.

That bylaw, which introduced further prohibitions on freedom camping within the district, was put in place after freedom campers were having a noticeable negative impact on the environment.

The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association sought a judicial review and, after the High Court found in its favour, the council had to revert back to the rules under the 2011 Freedom Camping Act, which do not permit a blanket ban.



# Opposition to tourism predicted

**MATTHEW LITTLEWOOD**

**INCREASINGLY** fed-up Queenstown residents could revolt against over-tourism without urgent intervention to improve the resort's infrastructure.

It is a prediction included in the Regional Deal for Otago Central Lakes document, which Queenstown Lakes district councillors will discuss at today's meeting before sending it to the government for assistance and approval.

The document said without intervention and more investment Queenstown risked "becoming the next Barcelona" where there have been protests against mass tourism, which could garner "worldwide attention and creating a reputation of local hostility".

The report included data from a resident survey showing Queenstown had the lowest tourism approval rating in New Zealand. The score of 18 indicated "disapproval" and less than half the national average of 48.

"As visitor numbers grow, residents' sentiment towards tourism declines, resulting in a less welcoming community and impacting visitor experiences," the document said.

"This stark difference shows the precariousness of tourism's social licence in this sub-region and highlights the urgent need to cultivate positive community attitudes by improving infrastructure and implementing effective destination management practices."

It also lists a host of priorities, which required the government working with the council in order to address them, such as roading.

It forecast some pretty dire outcomes if support did not come.

It predicted peak traffic doub-

ling on key routes and by 2028 average travel times would match today's peak.

"For example, peak times between Lake Hayes Estate and Queenstown Town Centre [11km trip] are projected to regularly exceed 60 minutes."

Traffic congestion could also risk visitors bypassing Otago Central Lakes.

Queenstown Lakes District Mayor Glyn Lewers acknowledged there were a host of issues which could come to a head if they were not addressed.

But he felt the solutions outlined in the

document, which required the assistance of central government and iwi partnership funding, could present a "magnificent opportunity" for the region.

There was the ongoing "social licence" issue of tourism and the region was already looking towards a model that highlighted experience over volume, he said.


"There's no magic bullet solution, but with this deal, we would like to think we at least have a bullet in the chamber."

The document — which mentions the word "tourism" more than 100 times — said Otago Central Lakes would already add billions of dollars of growth to New Zealand's GDP over the next decade, but the sub-region could "add billions more with the right infrastructure and services in place", "act as a shopfront for broader opportunities for NZ Inc" and "be a test bed for regional models that could be rolled out elsewhere" if the government got on board.

Mr Lewers said the region was not "consigning ourselves to the status quo" and the deal presented positive opportunities for everyone.

"This is our batting lineup. Now it's time for the government to let us take a swing."

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 As visitor numbers grow, residents' sentiment towards tourism declines



# Tourist attractions

I WAS pleased to be informed by the Philip Seddon and Yolanda van Heezik article (Opinion ODT 24.1.25) regarding the reasons that hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin) numbers are in deep decline.

It feels so recent when there was a high level of confidence among our conservationists regarding the increasing number of successful hoiho nests along our Otago/Southland coasts, as a result of predator control.

Philip and Yolanda provided us with a mighty reminder of what happens when we turn our back on nature for a moment and allow the balance to tip with greedy human technology such as set gillnetting and bottom contact trawling.

It was a timely article as our Prime Minister Christopher Luxon promises to push past impediments of all kinds for his self-described single-minded pursuit of growth in 2025.

As he aims to overload an already failing Queenstown infrastructure with more tourists, Mr Luxon would do well to stop and think about what really attracts tourists to this country and what will happen if we lose those very attractions while encouraging mining of the sea bed and the land of our very fragile environment.

Frances Anderson

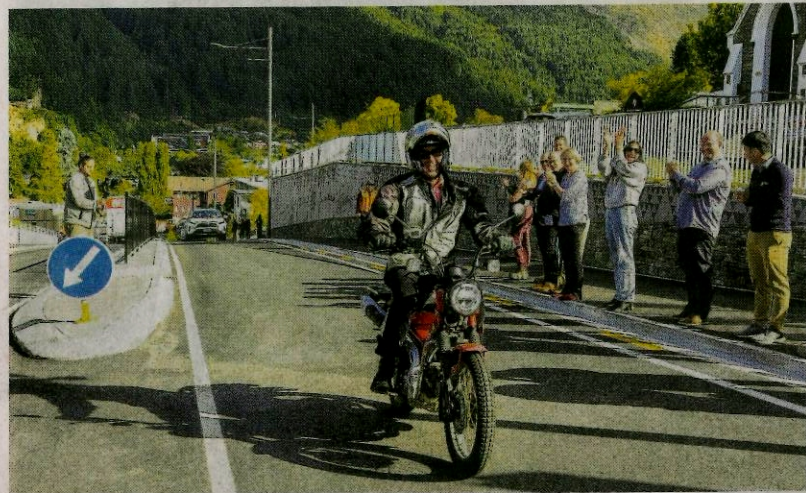
24/1/25 Alexandra



# REGIONS

## QUEENSTOWN

### ‘Challenging’ arterial bypass road open to traffic



Easy rider . . . Making the first motorised trip along Queenstown’s new arterial road yesterday is Queenstown Lakes District Council commercial and procurement manager Geoff Mayman.

PHOTO: STILL VISION PHOTOGRAPHY

#### ■ GUY WILLIAMS

MORE than three years after the first sod was turned, traffic is flowing on the first stage of Queenstown’s long-awaited arterial bypass road.

The 1.1km road linking Frankton Rd to Gorge Rd was opened in stages yesterday after a blessing ceremony.

Queenstown Lakes District Mayor Glyn Lewers thanked the community for its patience during the road’s construction, acknowledging it had been a “challenging and disruptive time for local residents and businesses”.

“It’s been arguably the most complex project we’ve ever delivered, and it’s safe to say it has taken longer and cost more than

we expected.”

Mr Lewers said the first stage would help to reduce traffic in the town centre, improve access for public transport, make streets more pedestrian-friendly, and provide space for the town centre to grow.

However, costs increases and delays have raised the ire of locals, and it has been dubbed the “road to nowhere”.

The first stage received a \$50m government grant in 2020 before getting fast-tracked consent as a Covid-19 recovery project the following year.

The public-private partnership tasked with delivering it, the Kā Huanui a Tahuna Alliance, made four requests for additional funding from the council, blowing its budget from \$50m to more

than \$128m.

Stages two and three, which would continue the road around the town centre before linking with the Queenstown-Glenorchy Rd roundabout, are not funded for construction.

The council’s long-term plan, adopted last year, has funding for early design and land acquisition beginning in 2029-2030.

Mr Lewers said the council would continue to lobby for funding to complete the full route.

Meanwhile, work continues on the first stage’s fringes, including construction work on side roads and landscaping.

On February 10, crews will move on to a stormwater upgrade on Stanley/lower Ballarat Sts that is associated with the project.

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