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Submission on Bay of Plenty Regional Council Te Mahere Tūroa Long Term Plan 2024-2034

April 2024

SocialLink Western Bay of Plenty is a registered charity based at The Kollektive, a not-for-profit co-working space enabling collaboration. SocialLink is the umbrella peak body for the social and community sector in the Western Bay of Plenty. Its vision is a resourced, skilled and cohesive for purpose sector enabling communities to flourish. Its purpose is to build the capability, confidence, sustainability and voice of community organisations in the Western Bay of Plenty.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

General Points

1. Community outcomes and Climate Change Action Plan

- SocialLink endorses BOPRC's connected communities and pursuit of excellence community outcomes.
- BOPRC's Climate Action Plan 2024-26 states that the plan relates mostly to community outcome 2 – Future ready communities and community outcome 4 – Sustainable development. SocialLink proposes that community outcome 5 – Pursuit of Excellence should also be very relevant to the plan. It is well established that vulnerable populations (e.g. low income, disabled) will shoulder a lot more of the negative impact of climate change, so an equity lens should be applied to the plan as well as explicit recognition of the impact climate change will have on iwi and hapu.

2. Review of BOPRC Development Contribution and Financial Contribution policy

SocialLink strongly supports the change to support the preamble of Te Ture Whenua Māori Act 1993 by considering the principles in making or amending any financial contribution rules and as a part of assessing any financial contribution.

3. BOPRC and Role of Volunteering

The Long Term Plan consultation document mentions the importance of volunteers to communities and how the work of the BOPRC includes supporting the volunteer community in protecting and restoring the environment.

Also noted is that BOPRC Regulatory Services provide 'region-wide coordination to Civil Defence and emergency management readiness, response and recovery work eg for major weather events.

SociaLink endorses the points raised in the Independent Review into Hawke's Bay Civil Defence and Emergency Management response to Cyclone Gabrielle (conducted by Bush International Consulting) and the recommendations made regarding the importance of planned and effective volunteer coordination, utilising the expertise of local agencies.

As stated in the report 'The great strength of local and regional government should be to understand and plan alongside local agencies, businesses, communities, volunteers, iwi Māori and marae, in order that their collective, ground level intelligence can reduce risks, build resilience and preparedness in advance of an event, and support effective response during it. Local leaders know their communities and whenua best.'

SociaLink's Volunteering Services has been actively preparing in the event that there is an emergency e.g. purchasing a platform that enables matching volunteers to tasks that emerge from an emergency and have initiated discussions with TCC and WBOPDC about Volunteering Services role in the event of an emergency. Volunteering Services is very happy to engage with BOPRC regarding how we can be of assistance in the event of an emergency.

4. Consultation Topic 1: How should we fund public transport in urban centres across the region?

We note that the BOPRC's preferred Option 2 would include a 10% general rates from all rate payers and 90% targeted rates (ratepayers in urban centres).

SociaLink supports Option 2 because all residents in the Bay of Plenty region should benefit from public transport services and initiatives, but we think more information should be provided on how the change will improve services for non-urban residents.

In the consultation document it is argued that benefits of transport operating in urban centres occur across the region, not only where services are delivered.

These benefits are identified as the opportunity for communities to be more connected, reduced congestion and carbon emissions and improved economic activity.

We accept reduced carbon emissions will benefit everyone, however this is an indirect benefit. We would expect income from option 2 would help with service improvement benefits such as improved availability, accessibility or frequency of public transport options for people living outside of the main BOP urban centres.

In the Council's 2022-32 Transport Plan Objective 2 'Convenient public transport that is accessible to all existing and potential customers' has a target directly focused on improving services in the broader region:

- 80% of residential dwellings in the region are within 500m of a public transport service by 2030.

For example, how will adopting option 2 support this objective and target for non-urban dwellers?

5. Consultation Topic 2. BOPRC proposal to enable a managed sell down of our Port of Tauranga Limited shareholding to no less than 28%.

SocialLink strongly supports the BOPRC proposal to reduce the shareholding to no less than 28% for the following reasons.

- Diversification of investments reduces risk and will likely result in stronger, more reliable dividend income.
- Selling down the Port of Tauranga stake means that other positive impacts could be achieved by the BOPRC through investing some of the proceeds into Bay Of Plenty opportunities that drive commercial returns, but also have high impact (ie housing, renewable energy etc).
- By retaining a 28% stake, it removes the risk of a takeover or any other undesirable decisions that could impact negatively on Bay of Plenty communities.
- The proposed sell down will likely also be a better option for the Port of Tauranga in terms of its ability to grow and continue to be commercially successful.

If BOPRC proceeds with the sell down of the shares, Sociallink strongly recommends the following regarding reinvestment of the proceeds:

- Invest only in responsible investments that contributes positively to environmental, cultural and social outcomes.
- Participate or initiate impact investments that, in addition to generating financial returns, also achieve positive environmental, cultural and social outcomes.
- Prioritise and increase investment in projects and infrastructure that will achieve equitable benefits to the region's population, rather than subsidising BOPRC rates.
- Prioritise local, followed by national investments over international investments.

Socialink also endorses Bay Trust's submission in relation to reducing Port of Tauranga shareholdings.

6.Consultation Topic 3: Should Regional Council investigate new opportunities for regional parks?

Socialink supports the Regional Council to undertake further investigatory work and due diligence on the potential locations of two regional parks near Katikati and Rotorua.

As pointed out in the consultation document, regional parks provide great opportunities for people from all walks of life to enjoy and derive wellbeing benefits from being in nature, participating in recreational activities and from the protection of cultural and archaeological features. Regional parks are also valued for the protection they can give to natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

With the increasing population in the Bay of Plenty, identifying and securing land for regional parks to protect our natural environment and for all to enjoy is essential and we support initiatives in this area.

For Western Bay residents, another regional park that is near Katikati would be a great amenity as well as for visitors from the wider Bay of Plenty and beyond. It would also likely be a boost for the community of Katikati which includes several areas of significant socio-economic deprivation.¹ Katikati may benefit economically from increased numbers of people using a nearby regional park.

The role of the regional Council in managing such parks and enhancing visitor experiences is significant and essential to continue. Studies have shown managed regional parks can connect people across neighbourhoods, communities and regions, foster cross-cultural relationships, help develop community social ties, help socialise young people through children and youth programmes and sustain communities.²

We would like to present an oral submission.

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¹ While Katikati itself has an average NZDep2018 score of 6.7, it has several areas of high deprivation (scores of 8 or over).

² Jakobcic, YL Stokowski, PA (2019) The role of regional park districts in strengthening community relationships, Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 37(3).