



Hon Simon Bridges  
Minister of Transport  
Parliament Buildings  
Private Bag 18041  
Wellington 6160

Dear Minister,

We, the undersigned are writing to express our concerns regarding the recent changes to the Super Gold Card scheme. We consider that these changes were introduced with insufficient public consultation and foisted on local government bodies with no funding in place to accommodate them. This is an immediate and further imposition on the ratepayer, which incidentally has not been foreseen in recently completed Long Term Plans.

We consider that the nature and origins of the scheme requires that it be administered by central government and is a policy more suited to a central government role, not exposed to the whims of local body politicians with all their various agendas. This scheme was developed by central government and is a central government responsibility.

We do not agree that competition will compensate for increased expenditure resulting from an aging population. Competition does not and is unlikely to exist in some services where the Super Gold Card scheme is most effective, such as rail transport in Wellington and Auckland. We consider that the inevitable effect, and possibly the intent of the recent changes, is that the scheme will become watered down as underfunding restricts access. Due to the capped funding of these changes, increases will be borne by ratepayers, who are already overburdened and they are likely to react strongly to the need for additional expenditure on the Super Gold Card. In order to continue the scheme, local bodies will need to introduce eligibility criteria and restrict access to the scheme. Ultimately local bodies may decide they are not going to fund the scheme at all. It will become a complex, underfunded, headache for all concerned.

We further submit that the wider health and economic benefits of the scheme have not been fully considered in these changes. While a capped funding scheme may, in the short term, generate a small amount of savings for government, these gains are likely to be given back in increased health care costs. Lowered use of the scheme due to underfunding or the introduction of eligibility criteria will result in an increase in avoidable hospitalizations due to decreased mobility and increases in social isolation leading to the requirement for more rest home care. The ASPIRE report (available at <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/pages/aspire-research-report.pdf>) showed that loneliness almost doubles the likelihood that an older person will enter residential care, with subsequent higher cost to the public purse, along with the overall health impacts of non-users which are associated with decreased social interaction in older age.

While we concur that there may be efficiencies to be made in the way that subsidized travel is paid out to transport operators, we consider that, if the scheme must be capped, it should also be indexed to increases in regional population growth, to enable entitlements to remain fully in place. Costs of administering the scheme should also be funded by central government, as this is a government policy. Further we consider that wider public consultation should be carried out on the changes to the scheme before they are rolled out.

The Government Super Gold website states that the Super Gold Card Scheme was awarded to older people in recognition of their contribution to New Zealand Society. We consider that the integrity and viability of the scheme must remain intact in order for older people to participate in the society they have contributed so much to.

John Hayes,

Chair, Kapiti Coast Older Person's Council

Duncan McDonald,

President, GreyPower Kapiti

Dermot Whelan

Manager, Age Concern Kapiti