New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee
Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

54th Parliament
August 2024

Petition of Jennifer Heath: Widen our school zoning options

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Greg O'Connor, Chairperson

Contents

Recommendation 3
Request to expand school zoning options 3
Comments from the petitioner 3
Horokiwi school zone 3
Comments from the Ministry of Education 4
Enrolment schemes 4
Schooling options for Horokiwi 4
Pressure on Wellington secondary schools 5
Wellington city primary schools 5
Future possibilities 6
Our response to the petition 6
Appendix 8

Petition of Jennifer Heath

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Jennifer Heath—Widen our school zoning options—and recommends that the House take note of its report.

Request to expand school zoning options

The petition was presented to the House on 20 February 2024. It requests:

> That the House of Representatives urge the Government to re-evaluate and expand Horokiwi's school zoning options to include Wellington city schools.

Comments from the petitioner

Jennifer Heath (the petitioner) lives in Horokiwi, a suburb north of Wellington. The petitioner describes Horokiwi as a semi-rural small community with fewer than 200 residents. There are no schools in Horokiwi and the suburb has no public transport.

Horokiwi can only be accessed by vehicle from one exit when travelling north on State Highway 2. If Horokiwi residents want to travel south, they must first drive north and exit to turn their vehicle around.

Horokiwi school zone

The petitioner told us that Horokiwi is in the enrolment zone for Lower Hutt state schools. This means that school-aged children and young people in Horokiwi are guaranteed places in those schools. If Horokiwi families want to send their children to state schools in Wellington city, they must apply, and are not guaranteed places.[1]

Travel time

The petitioner gathered feedback from the community; the overriding comments were that the school zoning does not work for Horokiwi families and has been an issue for decades. She considers that the main issue is the time that it takes for Horokiwi parents to take their children to school and pick them up. The petitioner believes that a parent who works in Wellington would spend around an hour on a weekday morning taking their children to school in Lower Hutt and then driving to the city. The afternoon trip by the parent, which would involve driving well beyond Horokiwi after picking up the children to access a place to turn around, would take about the same length of time.

We understand that the petitioner is also concerned about parents being separated from their children in an emergency. In an earthquake or extreme weather event, she told us that parents working in Wellington would be cut off from their children at school in Lower Hutt.

[1] See Ministry of Education: For parents and whānau.

Dual school zoning

The petitioner would like Horokiwi to be in the enrolment zone for both Wellington and Lower Hutt state schools. She told us that a couple of families in Horokiwi have children who attend schools in Lower Hutt and are happy with this arrangement. Dual school zoning would allow those children to attend schools in Lower Hutt and would give other families the choice of sending their children to schools in Wellington.

The petitioner believes that, by sending their children to schools in Wellington, a Horokiwi parent who works in Wellington city would spend far less time driving. She gave the example of Wellington Girls' College: Horokiwi parents who work in the city would only need to drive for 30 minutes in the morning and then 20–25 minutes in the evening to drop their children off and pick them up there.

Few families in Horokiwi have school-aged children. The petitioner says that if Horokiwi children were also in the enrolment zone for Wellington schools, it would not significantly increase the number of children attending Wellington schools.

Comments from the Ministry of Education

Enrolment schemes

The Ministry of Education manages the schooling network. It uses enrolment schemes (which include zoning) to:

- prevent overcrowding in schools
- allow applications for school enrolment to be selected fairly and transparently
- enable the Secretary for Education to make the best use of the state school network.

An enrolment scheme must not exclude local students and must ensure that no more students are excluded from a school than is necessary to prevent overcrowding.[2]

The ministry's guidelines for enrolment schemes state that a school's home zone:

- must be defined by geographic boundaries so that any address is either inside or outside the home zone
- must be an area for which the school would be reasonably convenient for a local student to attend
- may exclude any area for which another school is also a reasonably convenient school for a local student to attend
- may exclude any area so the Secretary for Education may make the best use of the state school network.[3]

Schooling options for Horokiwi

The Ministry of Education's data shows that 27 school-aged children and young people live in Horokiwi. The area is in the enrolment zone for Korokoro School (years 1–8) and Hutt Valley High School (years 9–13). The ministry said that Horokiwi families also have the options of other state schools that have space, state-integrated schools, kura, and private

[2] See Section 71 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

[3] Refer to Developing and establishing an enrolment scheme on the Ministry of Education's website.

schools. A Horokiwi family would need to apply for an out-of-zone place for a family member to attend a school in Wellington city with an enrolment scheme.

Pressure on Wellington secondary schools

We understand that the rolls of all secondary schools in Wellington are under pressure because of population growth. All but one of the state secondary schools in Wellington city are single sex. The secondary school that Horokiwi students are zoned to attend is co-educational.

The only co-educational state secondary school in the Wellington area is Wellington High School. The ministry does not support Wellington High School's zone being enlarged to include Horokiwi. The school has capacity for 1,037 students but in March 2024 had a roll of 1,918. A property project is planned to alleviate the pressure on the school's roll, but this will not be finished for years. Wellington High School is also a considerable distance from Horokiwi. The ministry is also concerned that if Horokiwi became part of Wellington High School's zone, other areas would also want to be part of that zone, putting even more pressure on the school's roll.

The ministry described the situation for single-sex secondary schools in Wellington city. Wellington Girls' College has significant pressure on its roll and a building project underway. Many out-of-zone boys attend Wellington College.

Enrolment scheme home zones must be contiguous. The ministry told us that this requirement would be difficult when drawing a home zone for Horokiwi to include state secondary schools that are single sex.

Other options

Horokiwi students could go to any state-integrated schools in Wellington city that do not have enrolment schemes. These schools have preferential enrolment for students who fulfil specific criteria but can also enrol "non-preference" students. Some of these schools are single sex.

The ministry noted that Newlands College's home zone is on the boundary of the Horokiwi area. However, Horokiwi residents accessing the college would face similar travel times to those mentioned by the petitioner because they would travel there using State Highway 1.

Wellington city primary schools

We understand that expanding the home zones of state primary schools to include another area would be of similar complexity to expanding the home zones of secondary schools. The ministry said that:

- Thorndon, Cashmere Avenue, and Ngaio Schools would fit the petitioner's criteria. Thorndon School is the only school in this group that offers schooling for years 1 to 8, and so would provide a pathway to a secondary school in Wellington city. Devising a contiguous home zone for Horokiwi that would include Thorndon School without including other schools would be difficult.

- Home zone options for both primary and secondary schools in any new area would need to be included to make sure Horokiwi students can engage with the full educational pathway.
- Horokiwi families can apply for places in out-of-zone primary schools. Thorndon and Ngaio Schools both have Horokiwi students who were enrolled as out-of-zone applicants.
- Like Newlands College (mentioned above), Bellevue, Paparangi, and Newlands Schools' home zones are on the boundary of Horokiwi. The travel times for Horokiwi families to these schools would be similar to those mentioned by the petitioner because access to all of these schools is by State Highway 1.

Future possibilities

A road linking Petone to Grenada was planned in 2016–17, and would connect Horokiwi directly to Newlands. The Government recently released its draft Government Policy Statement on land transport, which lists the link road as a "Road of National Significance". This means that the Government sees building the road as a priority.[4]

Enrolment schemes can be changed. The ministry and affected schools monitor the success and effectiveness of enrolment schemes regularly. The ministry told us that it determines where and when adjustments are necessary. Adjustments could be proposed, for example, if a school or schools became more accessible for Horokiwi residents—as they would if the road linking Horokiwi to Newlands were built. In that situation, the ministry would consult with people, including Horokiwi families.

Our response to the petition

We are grateful to the petitioner and the ministry for providing us with clear and useful information. We acknowledge the travel difficulties for Horokiwi parents who work in Wellington city and whose children attend schools in Lower Hutt. These difficulties are because there is only one road in and out of Horokiwi, which can only be accessed when travelling in a particular direction on a state highway. Reaching places that appear close to Horokiwi can involve lengthy journeys because of Horokiwi's relative inaccessibility.

We understand that enrolment schemes and home zones for state schools are part of a complex system to ensure that all school-aged children and young people can access a full educational pathway. The ministry must balance many considerations, including each school's roll, ensuring that local students are not excluded, and making the best use of the state schools within its network. For state secondary schools in Wellington city in particular, the ministry must consider the risk of overcrowding. Wellington High School's roll far exceeds its capacity. We would not want to put more pressure on those schools' rolls by expanding the zones they serve.

We note that Horokiwi families are not confined to the two schools in Lower Hutt for which Horokiwi children and young people are guaranteed places. Those families can apply for out-of-zone places at state schools with enrolment schemes. Their other options are to send

[4] See Draft Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024-34, page 11.

their children to other state schools that have space to take more students, state-integrated schools, kura, or private schools.

We note that the ministry reviews the performance of its enrolment schemes regularly. The ministry told us that it also responds to changes to the environment that would affect enrolment scheme boundaries, including school roll pressures and changes to road access.

We do not consider it appropriate for us to recommend a change to school zoning for Horokiwi outside the normal reviews. We encourage the petitioner to engage with the progress of the proposed Petone–Grenada link road. We think that improving the access to Horokiwi may, ultimately, be a better way for Horokiwi's children and young people to have more choices as to which school they may feasibly attend.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition was referred to us on 20 February 2024. We met between 7 March and 1 August 2024 to consider it. We received written submissions from Jennifer Heath and the Ministry of Education.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)
Carl Bates
Kahurangi Carter (from 6 December 2023 to 8 May 2024)
Greg Fleming
Francisco Hernandez (from 8 May 2024)

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the Parliament website.