

Attn: Mere Mokoraka
Department of Conservation
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18 May 2021

Kia ora Mere

Whakapapa Village – change to public parking areas and restrictions

Federated Mountain Clubs was founded in 1931 and advocates for New Zealand's backcountry and outdoor recreation on behalf of 21,000 members in 99 clubs. FMC has taken, and continues to take, a leading role in the establishment of protection and ongoing robust planning for much of New Zealand's public conservation land.

We welcome the opportunity to provide our submission for the current Whakapapa Village parking restrictions consultation process.

If the opportunity is available, we wish to be heard in support of our submission.

We would, firstly, like to acknowledge the ongoing challenges relating to visitor numbers and congestion in the Tongariro National Park, and we remain committed to helping the Department of Conservation arrive at equitable and practical solutions. The points of our submission are as follows:

- We applaud the measures taken to simplify the parking arrangements, and having minimal seasonal changes to avoid confusion.
- Our general observation of the parking restrictions is that they appear to be an attempt to discourage visitors in cars from visiting Whakapapa Village. If such measures are to be implemented, alternative public transport options must be available. Currently, a reliable public transport service into the park from the nearest park and ride at National Park village does not exist. Private shuttle services need to be booked in advance, and therefore deny the ability for recreationists to be flexible with their plans, or indeed, make last minute arrangements for their plans if they drive to Whakapapa Village to find there are no parking spaces available. The Tongariro National Park Management Plan has a preference for public transport solutions, and these need to be in place before parking restrictions become too onerous. In addition to this, though, we would also like to point out that in order to work well, any public transport system needs to be fit for purpose for the users of the area. We would like to request that FMC be part of any working groups or consultation regarding public transport in the area so we can assist in the development of practical solutions.
- We do not support the closing of the Taranaki Falls carpark at the end of Ngauruhoe Terrace. This is off the main road, out of the way and provides for day walks directly from the road end. Should this car park closure go ahead, FMC would like to be provided with the rationale for this.
- Further to the above point, we do not support the "No Stopping" zones along Ngauruhoe Terrace, along the uphill side of the fire station to the turnaround zone, and along the road in front of the

visitor centre car park. We see no reason why a parkable verge can't be put in place along these zones, particularly as it would stay within the road reserve and not disturb any native vegetation.

- An “in person” permit system denies the ability to make last minute decisions on outdoor activities based on the weather and conditions. If a permit is going to be required, these must be available online so they can be easily obtained without altering trip plans, or indeed, to aid the appropriate altering of trip plans so recreationists can make safe decisions.
- We do not support the lack of provision for overnight car parking without a permit. Whakapapa is the starting point for a number of overnight and multi-day tramps. Especially in the summer months, when backcountry recreationists will seek early starts, the requirement for people to personally attend the visitor centre for a permit could cause unreasonable delays to people starting their day, resulting in unnecessary time pressure on the trail. We would like to propose that the parking opposite the bus park be a designated overnight park year-round.
- We do not support the lack of provision for day parking without a permit during the winter season for the same reasons as above. It puts time pressure on people who need to start their day in the backcountry earlier than the visitor centre opens. We understand that this is to discourage ski field patrons parking in Whakapapa Village, but it would be entirely feasible to have shuttles from National Park Village act as “drop off only” at Whakapapa Village, so there is no mechanism for the provision of day parking to be abused this way. We would like to see the green zones be day parks year round.
- As we have indicated, FMC understands and supports public transport and carbon neutral solutions, but at the same time, urges the department to keep a clear view to continuing to make the Tongariro National Park easily accessible for recreationists. There will always be a need for car parking to be available in the village to accommodate late finishes and early starts, and the requirement for large loads of equipment for some backcountry endeavours, such as climbing, packrafting and whitewater kayaking, where public transport is not necessarily a practical option.

We note that the Department is unable to legally enforce the restrictions and as such, would like the Department to consider a moderate approach that encourages visitors to comply by choice, on the basis that public transport alternatives are attractive enough to support that choice. We believe the above measures would go some way to achieving this.

I am happy to make myself available for further kōrero on any of the above, or other related matters, if you feel it would be helpful.

Ngā mihi,

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