The financial cost of providing parking (land leases and maintenance) at the Hamilton campus has risen substantially in recent years, and is currently around $250,000 a year. At peak periods our current car parks are full, meaning that with no change in policy we face an immediate challenge in providing additional car parking in the near future. Providing that additional parking would come at additional financial and environmental cost if a large area of lawn and garden was paved over to provide an additional car park. The financial cost would be even greater if the demand was met by the construction of a parking building.

Consistent with the support of a majority of the University community for sustainability, and on the recommendation of the University’s Sustainability Committee, I decided that before considering the construction of more car parks, the University should attempt to moderate demand for parking by introducing a charge for parking. This is consistent with the approach taken at other tertiary institutions in New Zealand, the University of Waikato currently being the only University in the North Island that does not charge for parking.

Given that at present all students pay the same tuition fees and student levies, free parking is a cross subsidy imposed on those who live near the campus and walk, or who take public transport, and provided to those who drive and park at the University. The University considers there is no reason for the large number of students who are incurring the cost or renting accommodation on or near the campus should be asked to subsidise the costs of providing parks for others.

The strategy being adopted by the University is designed to reduce demand for parking and to increase the desirability of public transport as an alternative. To achieve this the University has:

(i) Adopted parking charges which provide a signal to the University about the true cost of providing car parks (since the parking charges are expected to raise revenue roughly equivalent to our current costs of providing parks).

(ii) Entered into discussions with the transport planners from the Regional Council and City Council to improve the public transport services and reduce the cost to students of using public transport. In particular, the University has indicated to the Regional Council and City Council that it is prepared to use revenue raised by parking charges to underwrite the introduction of a student concession fare and to underwrite the introduction of new “point to point” public bus services to the University. These discussions are continuing at present.

The parking fees have been carefully set so as to minimise the impact on students and staff at the lower end of the pay scale. The fees have been set at a level that will generate revenue just sufficient to cover the costs of providing parking, to ensure that the fees are not seen as a “revenue gathering” exercise. The fees also take into account periods during the year when parks may not be used because of holidays or other absences, and might encourage people to consider changing behaviour around driving to campus.

The University has carefully considered the introduction of a parking charge, and considers that it is strongly justified in terms of the University’s commitment to environmental sustainability and its desire to avoid imposing cross-subsidies through its fees. However, the University is still considering exactly how to implement this policy and has indicated to the President of the Waikato Student Union that it is open to discussing and trying to address concerns that they have expressed about the implementation of the policy. The University remains open to constructive engagement as it works through a range of implementation issue.

Professor Neil Quigley
Vice-Chancellor