

CIRCULAR



GPS lays out
\$20 billion
transport changes



End of the road
for the *Circular*



Childhood
curiosity led to a
lifelong career

APRIL 2024

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Cover: Waikato Regional Council are the latest recipients of new electric buses, with six hitting the road in April to replace the existing diesel buses. Double-decker electric buses are expected later this year to boost capacity at peak times. *Photo: Waikato Regional Council*

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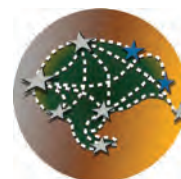
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CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

This edition of the *Circular* is sadly our last. Change is inevitable, and the way people share news, promote their products, become informed and connect with others has changed. Globally, print media has been replaced by the immediacy and convenience of online news and e-newsletters. In addition, our industry has consolidated, and the ways operators make purchase decisions have changed.

Historically, the *Circular* generated income for the BCA through advertising revenues exceeding production costs. For years now though, the *Circular* has run at a loss. In early 2023, a decision was taken to only produce a magazine every two months, to reduce the annual loss. I really hoped we could turn that around, but we have not succeeded.

However, I am delighted to share that we have entered a partnership with Prime Creative Media, the publishers of the Australasian Bus and Coach magazine, that will see increased New Zealand content in their high-quality production. You can read more about this in this edition.

As we are getting ready to go to print, the Minister of Immigration has just announced that the residence pathway for Bus Drivers and Truck Drivers has been shut to new entrants. This is because the Minister considers there is no longer a shortage of drivers, so the residency carrot no longer needs to be dangled. We have written to the Minister to note the risks associated with this decision and will work with operators to monitor the impact.

Recently, the Government consulted on the draft Government Policy

Statement on Land Transport 2024/34 (the GPS) which the BCA provided feedback on. This is a critical document, setting out the Government's transport priorities and where the money is going to go, replacing the draft GPS the previous government consulted on but never finalised.

The BCA has also strongly signalled a need for improved procurement of public transport services, and that the same level of central government scrutiny being proposed for roading investment should be extended to public transport. Service costs have increased significantly without a corresponding increase in service levels.

While we applaud the increased investment in road maintenance and the focus on good procurement and efficient delivery, we are disappointed by the effective drop in investment in public transport services. The priorities for New Zealand set out in the GPS cannot be met without bolstered investment in public transport, and we will continue to engage with the Government to highlight this critical flaw in their policy.

The BCA has also strongly signalled a need for improved procurement of public transport services, and that the same level of central government scrutiny being proposed for roading investment should be extended to public transport. Service costs have increased significantly without a corresponding increase in service levels. The unintended consequences

of procurement decisions on economic, environmental, and social outcomes are clearly not well understood. Poorly informed vehicle specifications, inefficient contract lengths, poor contract structure, agency costs and contractual compliance costs are driving the price tag up and up.

The Public Transport Operating Model review was a prime opportunity to reset the

operating context for public transport procurement and failed miserably with the subsequent Sustainable Public Transport Framework. New Zealanders deserve better value for money from their investment in public transport and it is time that central government stepped up and became a smart investor on behalf of taxpayers and ratepayers. The BCA can and will help with this.

In the Loop update

A CATCHUP ON ALL THE RECENT 'IN THE LOOP' NEWS



with Delaney

Recently, there have been a lot of reports of vehicles speeding past school buses, including marked police cars. This issue has come to light just as the Government is considering implementing variable speed limits near schools. It's an opportunity to remind the Government about the safety risks associated with vehicles passing stationary school buses and to urge them to take action. Last week, I discussed this matter with James Meffan from the Ministry of Education, along with the President of Rural Women New Zealand, Gill Naylor. We also talked about route designs that don't always prioritise dropping off kids on the correct side of the road. This is a crucial issue for the sector, as we can't afford to go back to the days when children were at risk of being killed while crossing the road from their school bus. We need to see progress on this front to ensure the safety of our children.

Removal of Work to Residence arrangements



On 7 April, the Minister of Immigration issued a press release that included measures intended to reduce levels of net migration. This included immediate changes to the Accredited

Employer Worker Visa (AEWV) and closing the Work to Residence pathway to bus and truck drivers effective immediately. BCA met with MBIE on 8 April seeking to understand the advice the Minister had received to inform these changes. We have subsequently written to the Minister expressing our concerns. You can find more on the changes to the AEWV at <https://shorturl.at/blep2> including the new minimum skill requirement, minimum standard for English and shortening of visa length and stay in New Zealand. And you can find the announcement that bus drivers who apply for an AEWV after 6 April 2024 will not be eligible for a Transport Work to Residence visa at <https://shorturl.at/gjxzS>. For assistance with individual cases, the MBIE Contact Centre is available from Monday to Friday from 6am to 10pm. Either on 0508 558 855 or <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/contact> for full details. You can also email Brendon.Gardner@mbie.govt.nz for general guidance on the changes.

Road safety week



This year's Road Safety Week is set to take place from May 20–26 and is organised by Brake, a well-known road safety charity. The theme for 2024 is Be a Road Safety Hero and Brake encourages everyone to get involved by visiting www.roadsafetyweek.org.nz/organisations for ideas on participating. You can easily sign up for a free electronic action pack to help spread awareness and promote safer road practices to your staff, contractors, customers, and community. The BCA is excited to participate by highlighting several important road safety messages. It's a great opportunity for us to engage with our community and emphasise the importance of safe driving habits. Let's work together to make our roads safer for everyone during Road Safety Week and beyond.

BCA midyear function



BCA midyear function



This year's function is hosted by the South Island Branch at The George in Christchurch Central. The June 26 event will feature a delicious sit-down lunch, a guest speaker, and ample opportunities for networking and socialising. Members will have the chance to engage with the BCA Board and Management, sharing their thoughts and ideas from 11:30am onwards. Further details will be provided soon, but if you're interested in sponsorship opportunities, please contact Ginny Terry, President of the South Island Branch, at mgmt@harkerss.nz. Please note that the Auckland Branch will not be holding a mid-year function, making this our primary mid-year gathering. We encourage you to book your flights early to secure the best prices.

New Board Chair for NZ Transport Agency



Hon Simon Bridges is now serving as the Chair of the NZ Transport Agency Board. The BCA was consulted on this appointment and has given its support. This decision recognises Bridges' significant experience as a former Minister of Transport and his strong business acumen, which will be valuable assets in his new role.

AUCKLAND

Commuters turning to buses as train reliability wanes



Since late February, public transport in the city has been overrun with over two million trips taken each week. This comes as workplaces and schools return in 2024. With buses almost back to their pre-pandemic levels, trains are struggling with delays and closures due to rail maintenance work by KiwiRail. Auckland Transport's Growth and Optimisation Manager Richard Harrison highlights the importance of reliability in transit choices. Auckland Transport is frequently adjusting bus services to meet demand. While some bus cancellations occur due to traffic, they're minimal compared to scheduled services.

HAWKE'S BAY

School bus fares surge up to six times their current rates

From May 2024, the Hawke's Bay Regional Council plans to raise fares for children and pensioners to adult rates. This means one-zone trips and Bee Card fares will increase to \$2, while Community Service Card fares will go up to \$1.50. The justification for these changes stems from rising operational costs and the end of NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) funding for certain age groups. Residents such as Melanie Marsh and Karl Goodchild have voiced their concern over the financial strain the increase will cause. Marsh, a single mother residing in Hastings, says her son's bus fare will triple from \$40 monthly to \$120 monthly. Karl's cost of sending his two sons to Lindisfarne College in Hastings will increase from \$380 to \$2200 per year. Napier MP Katie Nimon has asked the community to voice their concerns, saying the Government "strongly believed" in funding public transport.

HAMILTON

Community transport providers share \$200k fund

Eighteen community transport providers across Waikato gained a share of \$209,500 from the latest round of the Waikato Regional Council Community Transport Grant fund. Now in its second year, the fund supports community organisations that help Waikato residents with transport needs that aren't met by the public transport network, generally in rural and remote areas or where specialised support is needed. When people need to reach hospital appointments, social services, marae and other critical amenities, these organisations are often the only means they have. This year's recipients support various communities across the region including Thames-Coromandel, Waihi, Paeroa, Matamata-Piako, Waipā, Ōtorohanga, Te Kūiti, Tokoroa, Raglan, Hamilton, Taupiri, Ngāruawāhia, Huntly, Te Kauwhata and beyond.

PALMERSTON NORTH

The streets are quieter thanks to electric bus fleet



Over 40 new electric buses have hit the streets of Palmerston North as part of a substantial investment in public transport, and doubling services. Initial adjustments include route changes and some hiccups, such as missed buses and confusion at new stops, but commuters and operators have expressed that they optimise the long-term benefits and back the shift to electric buses for their environmental benefits. The bus network costs approximately \$11 million annually, offering increased frequency and extended operating hours, catering to diverse travel needs. Horizons Regional Council aims for a significant boost in passenger numbers, eyeing a transition

to a fully electric fleet as a milestone in enhancing urban mobility. Drivers like Charles Te Peeti praise the smoothness and comfort of the new buses, which are devoid of diesel odours. These buses, equipped with air conditioning, provide a pleasant ride for commuters, offering a quieter journey conducive to conversation.

CHRISTCHURCH

Bizarre booty left on buses

Most lost belongings left on Red Bus routes are typical items like phones and wallets, but Christchurch commuters have recently left an eclectic array of items, including a trombone. A particularly memorable incident occurred when a mother realised she had unintentionally left her child aboard a departing bus. Quick action from Red Bus staff ensured the child's swift return. Among the unusual items are false teeth, hearing aids, passports, and significant sums of cash. Items left unclaimed after a month are donated to charity, while valuables remain with the bus driver for two months before disposal. Red Bus's lost property cupboard is an eclectic mix of forgotten items, from macadamia nuts to tennis rackets. In one instance, a bag of marijuana found its way into the mix, ultimately disposed of by Operations Manager Layne Sefton after a brief stint on his desk.

OTAGO

Council votes to keep half-priced bus fares for children

The Government's Community Connect fare subsidy (for those aged 13 to 24) is set to end on May 1. However, the Regional Council remains committed to accessibility and affordability for its youngest passengers, with children aged five to 12 still able to enjoy free bus travel. The half-price concession will remain available for individuals with a Community Services Card or utilising total mobility services. Council Chair Gretchen Robertson says they understand the importance of meeting the demand for public transport while ensuring it remains affordable for all passengers, particularly children.

UK

£143 million investment for national zero-emission bus rollout



The UK Government's commitment to greener transportation has received a £143 million investment to introduce nearly 1,000 new zero-emission buses across England. Transport Secretary Mark Harper announced the allocation of funds, emphasising the importance of decarbonising bus fleets and extending reliable transportation to rural areas. Twenty-five councils and communities nationwide, from Derbyshire to Devon, will benefit from this initiative and see the introduction of zero-emission buses. The focus is on making local journeys cleaner, more reliable, and more comfortable. This is part of the second phase of the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas programme, building on the success of its predecessor to promote the uptake of electric buses across various regions. Director of Policy and External Relations at the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Alison Edwards, welcomed the government's support, highlighting the opportunity for Britain to lead the world in creating a modern, sustainable bus network.

SCOTLAND

A trial of flat bus fares after a review of public transport costs

Transport Secretary Fiona Hyslop has announced recommendations from the 2024 Fair Fares Review which proposes a flat fare for bus trips and free inter-island foot passenger travel for under-22s in the Western Isles, Orkney, and Shetland. The Review also suggests

extending the National Ferry Scheme for 18- to 21-year-olds and piloting free rail travel for the companions of eligible blind individuals. Fiona says it is important to focus on accessible and affordable public transport to reduce car usage. However, the review has received criticism for lacking a clear plan to reduce car dependence. Scottish Conservatives expressed disappointment, while sustainable transport campaigners urged for immediate action to make public transport more cost-effective compared to driving.

IRELAND

Eight new bus services launch between Dublin and Belfast



Aircoach has confirmed the launch of new express services to assist in the high demand. This began in late March 2024 with the additional buses connecting Belfast, Dublin Airport, and Dublin's O'Connell Street, and now includes a stop at Maghera. This is set to benefit passengers in the Mid-Ulster area, offering a direct link to major airports and urban centres. Aircoach has the most extensive service frequency among coach operators on the Dublin-Belfast route. Ahead of their 25th anniversary, they announced their dedication to connectivity, providing 17 journeys daily in each direction, with adult fares starting at €13. Managing Director, Kim Swan says they intend to continue offering reliable, convenient, and affordable transport options.

INDIA

Spotlight swings to electric buses in green transport initiative

The Indian Government has set goals to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2070, focusing on the decarbonisation of buses, metro rail, light rail, and waterborne transport systems. The

country currently contributes 12 per cent of CO2 emissions globally and initiatives like the introduction of compressed natural gas buses in Delhi have spurred the adoption of electric buses. However, the high cost of decarbonisation measures and the need for efficient and affordable public transportation are hindering progress. Despite obstacles, continued investment in green transportation is being sought to improve air quality and combat climate change in India's rapidly urbanising cities.

JAPAN

Bus and taxi licence tests to go multilingual



To address driver shortages, Japan is offering driver licence tests for taxis and buses in foreign languages. The National Police Agency has distributed sample questions in 20 languages to prefectural police forces. Currently, the class two driver's licence test, necessary for passenger transport vehicles, is only available in Japanese. Foreign nationals comprise 0.6 per cent of licence holders, prompting the move to introduce multilingual testing. The languages will include Asian languages like Chinese and Korean, alongside European languages such as English and Portuguese. This change aligns with the testing system of the class one driver's licence, which has been available in multiple languages since 2009. The class two exam focuses on technical aspects like vehicle safety procedures and omitting questions on customer interactions.

END OF THE ROAD FOR THE *CIRCULAR*, AND A WHOLE NEW JOURNEY

Change can be hard but sometimes it is necessary or inevitable.

The *Circular* magazine has been a key part of BCA communications for decades. When the new BCA management team started in July 2023, we were keen to turn around the *Circular*, which had been struggling a little in recent years.

We have worked to improve content and have been pleased with the positive feedback received on both the *Circular* and In the Loop. One reader commented on the quality of the February 2024 issue recently saying the *Circular* has now become an “essential read”.

Over the last few years, the *Circular* has stopped ‘paying for itself’ and while we have tried to seek additional advertising, we haven’t been successful. The recent news about media organisations facing significant advertising declines that were impacting their viability was not surprising to us. *Circular* has gone from making \$11,000 in 2021 to losing

\$32,000 in 2022, \$44,000 in 2023, and \$19,000 in 2024.

We don’t think that is the best use of your membership funds so have been exploring other ways to communicate effectively with members. This has included the revamp of In the Loop, the BCA LinkedIn channel (join us if you haven’t already), and an all-new BCA website with an online shop for signage, DoC cards, etc.

We are also looking at other ways to engage, including the Chief Executive’s regional visits, and we would welcome any other ideas from you.

While we will no longer publish and print the *Circular*, we have entered into an agreement with Prime Creative Media (PCM). PCM publishes the very popular Australasian Bus and Coach (ABC) magazine in electronic and hard copy formats.

This agreement will see the ABC magazine become truly Australasian with it

containing a monthly BCA column, a special New Zealand feature in advance of our annual conference and space for BCA content throughout the year.

BCA members will have free digital subscriptions to the ABC Magazine and weekly eNewsletter. Those members/individuals wanting hardcopy can also purchase a subscription. PCM will welcome any New Zealand members or current *Circular* advertisers who want content included in the ABC magazine. Links to content like the BusNews.com.au Industry News link will be included on the BCA website.

It is sad to say goodbye to the *Circular* in its current form, but we are excited about the opportunities this new relationship with PCM brings. As an Association, we are committed to providing our members with first-class advocacy and member services that match member needs. Let us know how you think we can enhance communication with members.





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GPS LAYS OUT \$20 BILLION TRANSPORT CHANGES

The Government’s signalling an increase in excise duty and RUCs over coming years to help pay for new roads that will help people ‘quickly and safely’.

The new draft Government Position Statement on Land Transport (GPS) has been released for consultation, replacing the previous Government’s draft version, and proposes some big changes.

As the Transport Minister, Hon Simeon Brown, mentioned in the last edition of *Circular* – Roads of National Significance “are back on the agenda”.

But first, a quick recap: the GPS is a statutorily required document that outlines the Government’s transport priorities and how it will raise revenue for the National Land Transport Fund (NLTF).

The NLTF - made up of RUC, fuel excise duty (petrol tax), car registrations, a Crown grant and Crown loan - is used to deliver the three-yearly National Land Transport Programme (NLTP), with allocations to “authorised organisations”, which are primarily NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA), local councils and KiwiRail.

The GPS tells NZTA how much money should be spent in different areas of the transport system, called “activity classes”.

The GPS is renewed every three years and guides investment in transport by providing a 10-year outlook of how spending is prioritised for the transport network.

It is prepared by the Ministry of Transport on behalf of the Minister of Transport and is published in draft form for public consultation.

While submissions on the GPS closed on 2 April, the Bus and Coach Association submitted their feedback on behalf of members.

You can access the draft GPS online at <https://www.transport.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/GPS-on-land-transport-2024-Consultation-4-March-2023-.pdf>.

Major Transport Projects



In announcing the GPS 2024, Brown stated “the Coalition Government’s plan to build and maintain a transport system that enables people to get to where they need to go quickly and safely”.

The draft GPS 2024 outlines the Government’s land transport investment priorities, and guides expenditure of around \$7 billion from the National Land Transport Fund (NLTF), and around \$1.5 billion from local government, each year.

Balancing investments between new projects and maintaining and repairing existing infrastructure, the GPS focuses on four priorities:

- Economic Growth and Productivity
- Increased Maintenance and Resilience
- Safety
- Value for Money

“Delivering on commitments in our Coalition Agreements, we are re-introducing the successful Roads of National Significance (RoNS) programme, with 15 projects to enable people and freight to move as quickly, and safely, as possible,” Brown says.

The RoNS include:

- Whangarei to Auckland
- Tauranga to Auckland
- Auckland roads
- Roads to unlock housing growth:
 - Hamilton Southern Links
 - Petone to Grenada Link Road and the Cross Valley Link
 - North West Alternative State Highway (SH 16).
- Other major routes:
 - Takitimu Northern Link Stage 2
 - Hawkes Bay Expressway
 - Second Mt Victoria Tunnel and Basin Reserve upgrade
 - the Hope Bypass
 - The Belfast to Pegasus Motorway and Woodend Bypass.

Overall, there is close to \$20 billion in transport investment: including up to \$2.3 billion for public transport services and \$2.1 billion for public transport infrastructure over the next three years.

This, Brown says, will help deliver “reliable, effective, and efficient public transport is a priority, particularly in our main cities of Auckland and Wellington”.

This will see the completion of the City Rail Link and the Eastern Busway in Auckland, with planning to be



OVERALL, THERE IS UP TO \$2.3 BILLION for public transport services and \$2.1 billion for public transport infrastructure over the next three years.

undertaken in the next three years for the delivery of the Northwest Rapid Transit Corridor and the Airport to Botany Busway.

For Wellington, the investment means the continuation of the Lower North Island Rail Integrated Mobility project, to upgrade rail network substations, and replace rolling stock for the Wairarapa and Manawatu lines.

The North-South, East-West, and Harbour Quays’ bus corridors will also benefit from the funding.

There is also a road maintenance fund and newly established State Highway and Local Road Pothole Prevention Activity Classes to address potholes on State Highways and local roads.

But as stated in *Circular’s* February issue, in which the Ministry of Transport’s Briefing to Incoming Minister highlighted a new approach to paying for land transport is needed. The Government recognises the increasing pressures on the NLTF, and the need to increase revenue.

“To balance the transport budget, we are proposing an increase to the Motor Vehicle Licencing (MVR) Fee by \$25 in January 2025 and a further \$25 in January 2026,” Brown says.

This will increase the annual cost of MVR in 2026 by \$50 for most vehicles, \$28 for Motorcycles, trailers and ATVs and \$16.5 for Mopeds. The increase

in MVR will add approximately \$530 million to the NLTF over the years 2024/25-2026/27.

A Crown grant (\$3.1 billion) and loan (\$3.1 billion) will feed into the overall investment pool with a 12 cent, 6 cent, and annual ongoing 4 cent per litre increase in Fuel Excise Duty, and RUC equivalent, in January 2027, 2028, and 2029, respectively.

TABLE 1. NLTF FUNDING SOURCES 2024/25-2026/27

NLTF Funding Source	Amount (\$ billion)
FED/RUC/MVR	14
Crown grant - capital expenditure	3.1
Crown loan	3.1
Total revenue	20.2

“While there has been a 71 percent increase in funding for public transport over the past five years, patronage has decreased by 23 per cent. This has partly been caused by COVID-19 restrictions, but numbers have not increased back to pre-COVID levels,” Brown says.

The Minister might not have had the Wellington region bus patronage figures for February at hand when publishing this statement: 2,333,339, an increase from 2,189,182 in pre-Covid February 2020.



THE DRAFT GPS PROPOSES FUNDING to help complete the Eastern Busway in Auckland, with planning to be undertaken in the next three years for the delivery of the Northwest Rapid Transit Corridor and the Airport to Botany Busway.

That's according to Wellington Regional Councillor and Transport Chair Thomas Nash, who has shared there were 110,225 bus boardings on 29 February. This eclipsed the region's previous record of 109,747 set two days earlier on February 27.

"Watch this space for a new record in busy March," he tweeted.

Despite this, this GPS is expecting greater farebox recovery and third-party revenue by Public Transport Authorities, such as councils, to help support the increased costs that are occurring through the public transport sector.

"The private share of funding for public transport over the same period has also fallen from approximately 32 per cent to 11 per cent which is putting significant funding pressure on local councils and the NLTF," Brown says.

"I expect the NZ Transport Agency to consider different ways of funding and delivering major transport projects. This includes 'Build, Own, Operate, Transfer' equity finance schemes, and value capture.

Ensuring local government pays their fair share, funding should also be supplemented by increased public transport fare-box recovery and third-party revenue."

Regardless, the release of the GPS now means that (once the public consultation process has concluded) Regional Land Transport Plans and Long Term Plans can now be finalised. These will also need to be publicly consulted on and agreed in order for regions to apply for government funding from the NLTF via the NLTP 2024/27.

"Alongside the draft GPS, we are signalling several system reforms, including shifting to a 10-year National Land Transport Programme, progressing legislation on time of use charging, and moving the whole vehicle fleet to RUC," Brown says.

"I invite local government, the transport sector, community groups, and the wider public to have their say on the draft GPS. Projects and funding commitments will be confirmed through the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) later this year."

Opinion: Rob Giller BCA Advocacy Manager

The World Economic Forum is often misattributed with the quote "You will own nothing and be happy". Behind this was an attempt to start discussions about technological development. The Draft GPS provides good short- to medium-term direction for land transport, but I can't help thinking a longer-term vision is missing and needs public debate.

Such a vision would help inform any future GPS being developed and allow us to test that the 50+ year life assets proposed for funding under this GPS are needed to support the vision of the future.

New Zealand is an outlier as a country with one of the highest rates of motor vehicle ownership in the world. My family has chosen not to have a car and we rely on active modes, public transport and mobility services. This is only possible if frequent and reliable public transport services are maintained.

My concern with the very strong roading investment focus in the Draft GPS is that it appears to come at the expense of other parts of the land transport system. No one has ever successfully built their way out of congestion, yet funding the roading layer at the expense of other parts of the land transport system seems only to encourage continued high rates of vehicle ownership.

If that is the vision for New Zealand's land transport system, that's fine. But if it's not, before the draft GPS is finalised, some rebalancing of the funding by activity class is required. The public transport service activity class funding in the Draft GPS grows at less than inflation and known future cost increases. There is no provision for the significant additional demand being forecast regionally.

Auckland Council has already indicated major cuts or fares doubling as a consequence of funding signalled in the draft GPS. I hope this doesn't come to pass and the final GPS includes some rebalancing. If not, I might be visiting some Wellington car yards soon!



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PASSION IS WHAT HAS GOT GARTH STEWART through 45 years in the bus and coach industry. “Once I find something I love, whether it’s my career or when I first met Karen, I wholeheartedly dedicate myself to it.”

CHILDHOOD CURIOSITY LED TO A LIFELONG CAREER

“Buses have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember,” says Garth Stewart,

“I suppose I got a passion for buses, from quite an early age.”

Starting as a bus driver with the then Auckland Regional Authority (ARA), he, with some hard work, climbed the ranks and has had various roles within the industry.

Now he says he’s found his favourite job yet – fronting Johnston’s Coachlines as its General Manager.

Growing up in New Lynn, West Auckland, Garth recalls noticing buses passing by his house and piquing his interest.

He began visiting the local bus depot on weekends and chatting with the staff. He watched the mechanics fix things, sometimes even sneaking into the pits for a closer look.

He’d chat with the bodybuilders and painters too, picking up tips on how they did their work. Back then, it was all roller-and-brush painting—no fancy spray machines yet.

“They were happy to have me around, and their enthusiasm to teach me only made me more passionate.”

In 1979, aged 21, Garth applied to the ARA for his first job as a bus driver. He was accepted and obtained his trolley bus license, as was the norm at that time.

For the first two years of his career, he primarily operated trolley buses along Queen Street and various school routes in Auckland before doing principal planning and tendering.

With 45 years of experience, Garth has seen massive changes within the bus industry.

As someone rooted in the old-school ways, he believes that modern practices tend to overcomplicate things, often surpassing what is truly necessary for success.

In the past, the industry operated without modern conveniences. Tools like the Cincinnati clock were used to start trips, there was no GPS to help navigate routes. Luxuries like air conditioning, radios, telephones or even power steering were yet to be created and all vehicle operated manually. In cases of incidents or breakdowns drivers had to seek assistance from nearby shopkeepers or pedestrians.

“Today, with all our modern technology the job's obviously much simpler.”

But behind the scenes, bus drivers now have complex Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that each company must adhere to.

“There have been good changes and some not so good.”

Based on his nearly half a century of experience, he says a major challenge for the sector is the shortage of bus parking across the country. Every day it's a juggle to find space. He feels that during lockdown, councils took advantage of people being inside and transferred a lot of coach parking into cycle lanes and walkways

“Take Queenstown, for instance. We ferry groups down to the steamer wharf for dinner cruises. But here's the kicker—there's no parking.

“The council's got a CCTV setup that snaps pictures of where we park, and if it's not where we're supposed to be, bam, we get a ticket. It's a real headache.”

With coach parking spaces disappearing, he says one might have to park in live traffic just to do their job.

“And it's not just Queenstown; it's happening all over. Hotels are popping up left and right without any parking plans in place.

“The councils need to wake up and smell the tourism boom. We're a vital part of it, and they've got to start accommodating us.”

He believes that the industry needs to return to the basics of punctuality, reliability, and customer service while also minimising unnecessary complexities that can hinder efficiency, emphasising that without this approach across the board, progress will be limited.

What Garth is trying to say is that bus operators should be doing more of blah and less of blah

In his career, he had quite a few standout moments. For instance, back when trolley buses were still running, Garth, one of the longest-serving drivers at the time, got to lead the very last public bus service in 1980 as they were being phased out. He did this alongside two other veteran drivers, marking the end of a significant era in public transportation for trolley buses.

“That's my claim to fame within the industry,” chuckled Garth.

More recent achievements include the role of Johnston's in the Managed Isolation and Quarantine (MIQ) efforts.

“During the lockdown from 2020 onwards, we transported all returnees across New Zealand to hotels or quarantine facilities.”

Garth believes that what sets Johnston's apart from other companies in the industry is the fact that they continue the tradition of allowing drivers to provide commentary, maintaining the company's old-school charm.

Speaking of future goals, he says he simply wants Kinetic to be the preferred choice for everyone.

“Not only for passengers seeking transport services, but also for individuals seeking employment opportunities.”

Coming from a family deeply passionate about transportation, Garth carries this into his hobbies. His grandfather, a railway historian, authored several books on railway paintings, while both his uncle and father played an important role in ensuring the trams were preserved in Auckland and also Wellington. They were also founding members of the tramway section a MOTAT.

Drawing from this heritage, Garth has spent the past 40 years researching West Auckland's bus companies.

Currently, he's nearing completion of a comprehensive history documenting the region's bus services from the 1920s to the 1990s. Thankfully, his wife of two decades, Karen, finds his passion endearing.

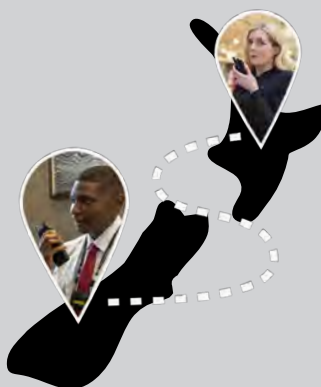
“Once I find something I love, whether it's my career or when I first met Karen, I wholeheartedly dedicate myself to it.”

Reflecting on his 45 years in the industry, people often ask if he is going to make it to 50 years, or retire first? “I'm determined to make it to the half-century mark, and when I do, you can do another interview as my final sign-off.”

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THE CHALLENGES FACED IN NSW ARE NOT UNIQUE to Australia and are seen in transport systems worldwide. New Zealand, with its own set of challenges, can benefit from studying the approach of the NSW Bus Industry Taskforce.

INSIGHTS FROM THE NSW BUS INDUSTRY TASKFORCE

With over 148 deaths in public transport incidents recorded in Australia in 2022 alone, the urgency for change became unmistakable.

The 2023 fatal bus crash in the Hunter Valley region, where a bus transferring guests from a wedding at Lovedale to Singleton rolled and killed 10 people, only heightened this awareness and served as a reminder of the pressing need for action.

The Bus Industry Taskforce had already been established by then by the Minister for Transport, Hon. Jo Haylen MP, but extended its area of focus to issues relating to seatbelts, other safety features, and the implementation of safety management systems following the fatal Hunter Valley bus crash.

Despite Australia's demographic and geographical differences, its public transport issues mirror many of New Zealand's (minus the fatalities).

Therefore, the Taskforce's work may have some answers, or relevance at the very least, to addressing the challenges many transport authorities and bus operators are wrestling with here.

The Taskforce comprises representatives from the industry, workforce, and community and is chaired by former NSW Transport CEO John Lee, with members including key stakeholders such as Matt Threlkeld, David Babineau, Mick Pieri, Joanna Quilty, Darriera Turley, and Darren Lane.

Its primary objective is to enhance the quality, reliability, and safety of bus services to prevent further loss of life on New South Wales' (NSW) roads.

The history of bus services in NSW saw a transition from

government-operated services under the State Transit Authority to privatisation in the late 1990s and early 2000s. During this transition, promises were made regarding continued funding and service provision to ensure a smooth shift to private operators.

However, challenges have persisted, and funds have yet to materialise.

The emphasis on infrastructure projects has taken precedence over investing in quality bus services. Driver shortages remain an issue, leading to disruptions and reliability issues. The absence of basic facilities for drivers at layover areas negatively impacts both driver well-being and service efficiency, and cost-saving measures during retendering have led

to experienced operators resigning, which in turn has affected service continuity and customer satisfaction.

In response to these challenges, the Bus Industry Taskforce saw a benefit in delivering six immediate recommendations in June 2023 – ahead of its first report – to tackle the State’s bus driver shortage.

Results from simple procedures such as making it easier and cheaper for people to get their bus driver’s licence and a statewide bus driver recruitment campaign were quickly apparent.

According to the Taskforce’s February 2024 Summary of actions, “the driver vacancy rate has halved, dropping to 249 vacancies by February 2024 compared to 502 in February 2023”.



THE NSW BUS INDUSTRY Taskforce’s final report is due to the Minister on 1 May 2024.

July 2023 saw the Taskforce’s first report published, comprising seven recommendations aimed at addressing the reliability, quality and effectiveness of bus services across NSW:

1. Transport for NSW works more collaboratively with industry and community on improving service delivery;
2. A long-term growth funding program be established to improve bus services to underserved communities around the state;
3. Transport for NSW undertakes activities to improve rural and regional contracting;
4. Organisational changes be made at Transport for NSW to ensure it is more focused on delivering services by mode;
5. Activities be undertaken to support bus driver recruitment and retention;
6. Transport for NSW enhances bus service delivery; and
7. That Transport for NSW reconsider the way it manages replacement and emergency bussing.

Each recommendation had a handful of sub-recommendations, divulging greater detail of the solutions required to improve service delivery.

However, following the Hunter Valley bus crash, the Taskforce’s areas of focus were widened to “contribute in a meaningful way to minimising the risk of this sort of event ever happening again”.

Additionally, in response to the Minister for Transport’s request “for an overview of any early findings in relation to the retrofitting of seatbelts on school buses”, Taskforce Chair John Lee writes in his introduction of the *First Safety Report* that “seatbelts save lives”.

The Taskforce made five recommendations that focused on the safety measures in place for both seated and standing passengers on buses, including school buses, regular route services and coaches.

Among the recommendations was the continued implementation of the NSW Rural and Regional Seatbelts Program in outer metropolitan areas, a road safety campaign to promote seatbelt usage on buses, and how bus operators can be best assisted to understand and comply with their obligation under clause 89 of the Passenger Transport (General) Regulation.

Therefore, the safety report also considered the range of different

sources of law and obligations and different regulators responsible for compliance and enforcement, as it raises “the possibility of both duplication and gaps”.

“Duplication may occur where laws have similar but distinct requirements and the regulated community is required to comply with both, which is resource intensive and may result in over-regulation. Gaps can occur where assumptions are made that a particular requirement or issues is sufficiently dealt with by the ‘other law’ or the ‘other regulator’.”

However, the Taskforce will consider the broader regulatory framework and any duplication or gap issues further in its future reports.

The most recent report, published in October 2023 with 27 recommendations, was the more damning of the Taskforce’s publications.

“The NSW bus system as presently configured is at risk of failing to deliver on the needs of a growing and expanding population in a financially and energy challenged environment,” the key findings state.

“The current system is struggling to keep pace with population changes. Feedback from passengers and the broader community suggests there is considerable room for improvement,

with many areas and communities inadequately serviced at present.

“At a more strategic level, there is an urgent need to refocus on the challenges of ongoing growth and equitable distribution of financially and environmentally sustainable bus services, built on a solid foundation of best practice asset management and safety assurance.”

There was much for the NSW Government to digest in this report but it had previously committed to responding to the Taskforce’s findings as these emerge, with most

recommendations made to date supported or supported-in-principle.

The Taskforce’s final report is due to the Minister on 1 May 2024.

Global examples, such as London and Singapore, offer insights into effective strategies for improving bus services.

London’s Transport for London employs innovative technologies and data-driven approaches to optimise bus routes and schedules, ensuring reliability. Similarly, Singapore’s Land Transport Authority uses advanced infrastructure and integrated

fare systems to enhance bus travel efficiency.

The challenges faced in NSW are not unique to Australia and are seen in transport systems worldwide. New Zealand, with its own set of challenges, can benefit from studying the approach of the NSW Bus Industry Taskforce. By examining the recommendations and understanding their applicability to New Zealand, transport authorities and policymakers have an opportunity to adapt proven strategies and leverage global expertise to improve our national bus services.

Opinion – Rob Giller, BCA Advocacy Manager

Part of the role of the BCA is to watch overseas developments and test applicability to New Zealand. As the article above shows, we are ahead of our ANZAC friends on some actions like addressing driver shortages but still have work to do to ensure we have a sustainable workforce. Australia is ahead of us in some other areas like the development of an Australian Design Rule for electric powertrain safety requirements, something we have raised with NZTA but that does not exist currently in New Zealand.

There are also very good learnings to take from cities like London where Transport for London is embracing new technologies and new design features to improve safety. The work done there on their world-leading bus safety standard has direct applicability to how we develop the ‘Requirements for Urban Buses’ in New Zealand.

I can’t believe for example that NZTA and regional councils allow the mounting of something equivalent of horizontal punji traps (bike racks holding bikes) on the front of public transport buses when research shows they will significantly increase the risk of passenger fatality in a collision.

We look forward to seeing what comes out of the final taskforce report and continuing discussions with our Australian counterparts at BIC and the state level.



THE TASKFORCE’S LATEST REPORT MADE FOR DIRE READING, describing the NSW bus system “as presently configured is at risk of failing to deliver on the needs of a growing and expanding population in a financially and energy challenged environment”.



TIM DUNCAN HOLDS UP GLOBAL BUS VENTURES' SILVER AWARD for Business Resilience at the Selwyn Awards 2023. GBV also won Gold in the Environment and Sustainability category.

TIM DUNCAN BIDS FAREWELL TO THE BUS INDUSTRY

After two decades in the sector and more than 15 years at Global Bus Ventures, Chief Executive Tim Duncan is stepping back from the bus industry.

Following in his father's electrician's footsteps, Tim, from Temuka in South Canterbury, started his career in electrical engineering.

Starting off as an industrial and automation electrician, he spent numerous years in the field before exploring various sectors within the electrical industry. Eventually, Global Bus Ventures (GBV) noticed his talent and recruited him for the advancement of cutting-edge diesel-electric buses.

In the early 1990s, GBV, then known as Design-Line, put together a team to develop the world's first electric bus.

The engineers scouted for this team all understood decades before anyone

else that electric drive systems were the future of transportation and wanted to pave the way for the successful creation and deployment of range-extended electric vehicles (EVs).

By 1997, they had successfully developed what are often referred to as 'series hybrids', in time for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. This vehicle, affectionately dubbed the "Olympus," served as the cornerstone of subsequent advancements in EV design and technology.

The increasing demand for electric buses spurred global exports. Tim's assignments took him to Hong Kong, Japan, the UK, and the USA. During this time, he continued to push the

boundaries of technology, remaining at the forefront of innovation in the electric vehicle sector.

Upon returning to New Zealand, Tim was promoted to his current position of Chief Executive at GBV and moved to the Rolleston branch in Christchurch.

He now leads a team of over 130 staff and 15 engineers who continue the company's drive for innovation and growth.

Recognising another gap in the market, Tim and his team also worked on an alternative zero-emission public transport solution, shifting from electric vehicles to three-axle hydrogen fuel-cell technology.

“The hydrogen internal combustion engine prototype was a proof of concept that we explored way back in 2009, but the technology wasn’t fully developed at that time,” says Tim.

“The hydrogen-powered prototype fuel cell not only charged batteries to operate electric drive systems but also served as the foundation for our hybrid bus designs, blending combustion and electric technologies.”

In 2021, the first-ever extra-large, three-axle hydrogen fuel-cell city bus hit the road in Auckland, marking a significant milestone in the project.

“It was a great chance to show off our work and the different low-emission vehicle choices.

“This is what we believe will shape the future of zero-emission urban transport for upcoming public transport tenders.”

While both EVs and hydrogen have their benefits, hydrogen buses, for example, don’t encounter the same limitations as fully electric vehicles. They can be refuelled in 10 minutes, parked anywhere in the bus depot, and boast substantially greater battery life.

Tim is also proud of GBV’s unique position as the sole coach-building company in the country capable of constructing buses entirely from scratch, including the chassis.

He also counts as a career highlight the opportunity to make personal connections with a diverse range of customers and team members.

“From electricians and welders to painters, refrigeration engineers, upholsterers, mechanics, and even aircraft engineers, each individual plays a crucial role in GBV’s success, and it’s been a pleasure to work alongside them.”

When discussing Tim’s achievements and time within the sector, colleagues and clients consistently say the same things.

South Island Controller for Ritchies, Alister McDermott, has worked closely with Tim and his team for years across their respective companies. Reflecting on their relationship, he says they have handled numerous school bus

contracts together, and building rapport with him came easily.

“He’s a stand-up guy, honest through and through, and gets the job done right every time.”

Tom McLeish, a colleague at GBV, also highlights Tim’s strong work ethic and willingness to get his hands dirty. Reflecting on his shift from Development Manager to Sales Manager at Tim’s invitation, Tom recalls: “When Tim asked me to make the switch, I was hesitant at first, but he said, ‘There’s no point dying without knowing.’ I’ve been in this position for five years now.”

He noted Tim’s keen insight into people’s skills and his knack for placing them where they would excel.

“He had a lot of knowledge to pass on and would often say, ‘I’ll handle the technical stuff, and you take care of the rest.’ His guidance and trust in our abilities made a significant impact.

“He will be missed not only within the team but also across the entire sector.”

When reflecting on his departure from the industry, Tim says it wasn’t an easy choice to make.

“I feel like I have two families—the one I’ve cultivated at GBV and my own with my wife and three kids.

“But at the end of the day, I’ve reached significant milestones in my professional life, and now I’m eager to redirect that same passion and dedication towards my family at home.”

As he passes the baton on to the next generation, Tim emphasises the continued importance of adaptability and a willingness to embrace change.

“Innovation is key to staying ahead in this industry. We must continuously evolve to meet the needs of our customers and the demands of the market.”



GBV HELPED BRING EMIRATES TEAM NEW ZEALAND'S hydrogen powered chase boat to life in 2022.



IN 2021, GBV DESIGNED AND BUILD NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST HYDROGEN FUEL CELL BUS.



GREEN PARTY Co-leader Hon Marama Davidson (left), now former co-leader Hon James Shaw, and newly appointed co-leader Chlöe Swarbrick. Photos: Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand/Facebook

CHLÖE SWARBRICK'S AND THE GREEN PARTY'S VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT IN NEW ZEALAND

After studying law and philosophy at Auckland University, Chlöe Swarbrick entered the political arena with a standout, but ultimately unsuccessful, Auckland mayoral campaign in 2016.

Just a year later, aged 23, she became the youngest MP since Marilyn Waring in 1975. Then, in 2020, she surprised many by winning the Auckland Central seat for the Greens, defying expectations set by polls and pundits.

Now, Chlöe joins Hon Mārama Davidson as co-leader of the Green Party, following former co-leader Hon James Shaw's decision to step down. This marks the first time in the party's history that two women will co-lead,

following a rule change in 2022 that eliminated the requirement for one leader to be male.

Chlöe has said she will use her new position to "grow the Green movement

to achieve tangible, real-world, people-powered change”.

Her commitment to change is reflected in the Green Party’s transport policy report, led by Transport Spokesperson Hon Julie Anne Genter.

The plan prioritises sustainable transportation modes such as public and active transport, aiming to reverse the traditional emphasis on road development and private motoring.

The Greens intend to push for investment in public transport so New Zealand towns, cities, and rural areas become less car-dependent and the use of fossil fuels for transport can be eliminated.

The goal is to allow everyone to experience equitable mobility freedom, where people can safely, conveniently, and independently get where they need and want to go.

To achieve their vision, the Greens have outlined a series of action points that include integrating public and active transport networks to provide high-frequency services with smooth transfers, offering a viable alternative to car usage.

Updating regulations in building planning standards will help prioritise safe access for pedestrians, including wheelchair users and those disadvantaged by the current transport system.

With a longstanding commitment to sustainability, they aim to phase out fossil-fuel vehicles by enacting a ban on their importation into New Zealand by 2030, with limited exceptions.

They will also promote the affordability of zero-emission heavy vehicles through measures such as tax incentives and funding. Central to their actions is the importance

of honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi by prioritising the needs of Māori communities in all decisions.

This policy would have significant challenges for bus operators and the sector overall. A major implication would be the requirement for buses to transition to zero-emission vehicles.



They will also promote the affordability of zero-emission heavy vehicles through measures such as tax incentives and funding. Central to their actions is the importance of honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi by prioritising the needs of Māori communities in all decisions.

This shift means bus operators will need to gradually integrate zero-emission vehicles into their fleets, which can be both costly and time-consuming and may necessitate changes in infrastructure and operational procedures to accommodate the new technology.

However, these challenges also offer opportunities for the industry to innovate and transition towards more sustainable practices. By embracing these objectives, the sector could lead the way in reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a greener future for New Zealand.

In contrast, the National Party’s Transport for the Future (plan focuses on investing in road infrastructure. This includes projects like building four-lane highways from Whangarei to Tauranga and addressing congestion in urban areas.

The National-led Government has also allocated funds for public transport improvements, especially in Auckland. This involves establishing a rapid transit network and finishing the Eastern Busway to improve transportation options and reliability on lower North Island train routes. Additionally, the plan prioritises rebuilding and enhancing resilience in regions affected by natural disasters. Projects to repair transport infrastructure damaged by floods and cyclones, along with upgrades in areas such as Ashburton, Queenstown, Otago, and Southland.

Despite differences, the Green Party welcomes efforts to improve transportation infrastructure but emphasises the importance of prioritising sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions. They are open to collaboration with other parties to advance policies that promote a more sustainable and inclusive transportation system.

With the possibility of the Greens entering government during Chlöe’s tenure as co-leader, she is likely to have considerable influence over the industry.



THE GOVERNMENT'S TRANSPORT PLANS WORK AGAINST OUR HEALTH

By Associate Professor Caroline Shaw and Dr Ed Randal

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Summary

The draft Government Policy Statement (GPS) on Land Transport 2024-34 neither supports the health and wellbeing of the population nor addresses the transport challenges of the 21st century. The current transport system causes thousands of preventable premature deaths and tens of thousands of hospitalisations and doctor visits every year through air pollution, injury, noise pollution and physical inactivity. The policies outlined in the draft GPS 2024 are, as a package, likely to worsen the already high levels of illness, disability, and early death in our communities caused by the transport system. This will have considerable implications for an already overburdened health system, as well as social, economic and environmental costs to society. The lack of plausible policy to reduce transport greenhouse gas emissions will further contribute to poor health through the impacts of climate change on the population.

In summary, the proposed policies will erode what current health benefits there are from transport, fail to deal with current health harms and will likely exacerbate these health harms in the short and long term.

Transport is a major determinant of health in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) through a wide range of pathways. Transport can both improve health (e.g. by facilitating access to employment and healthcare) and cause significant harm (e.g. through air pollution exposure). These benefits and harms are not spread evenly across the population.

Some groups, such as Māori, older people and more socioeconomically deprived people, gain fewer benefits from the system, suffer more of the adverse consequences and themselves contribute least to the harms of the system (as they drive less).

If we take physical activity as a specific example, physical activity is associated with reductions in cognitive decline

(40% reduction), risk for type 2 diabetes (35%), hypertension (33%), depression (48%), bone fracture risk (66%), breast cancer risk (20%), coronary heart disease and stroke (25%), and colorectal cancer (19%).

However, currently, less than half of adults and adolescents in NZ are getting sufficient physical activity to stay healthy,^{14,15} and 40% of children are not sufficiently active for health. Low physical activity was directly accountable for 920 deaths in 2019 and over 11,000 years of life lost in NZ.

People who use active transport modes, like walking, cycling, and public transport, are more likely to meet physical activity recommendations for health, compared to those who drive.

Nearly 60% of adult New Zealanders get daily physical activity from walking, much of which occurs in their local neighbourhoods. When people switch to active transport modes, the additional physical activity they get

almost always increases their overall amount of activity (i.e. not substituted from physical activity elsewhere).

Thus, active transport is the most important opportunity available to New Zealanders to increase their physical activity to adequate levels for health and the transport environment is key to facilitating or hindering this.

The health and wellbeing harms of the current transport system are extensive and significant

In NZ, the scope of death and disease caused by the transport system currently is substantial (at least on par with the harm from tobacco).

Additionally, compared to our global peers, we have extremely high levels of harm for both transport injury and transport-sourced NO2 air pollution.

These health harms have significant economic impacts. The annual social costs of the health impacts just from the air pollution harm from vehicles is estimated at more than \$10.5 billion. The social costs of road traffic injury are about another \$11.5 billion annually.

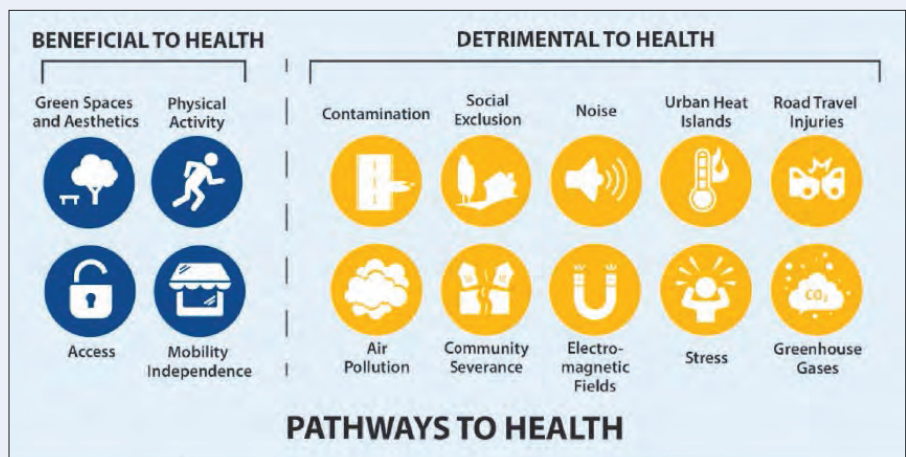
Greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector in NZ contribute to further health loss, through climate change. Climate change itself is considered one of the greatest health challenges of the 21st century. It is impacting a wide range of health conditions through weather events (e.g. floods and landslides) as well as altering ecosystems thus impacting food supply, costs and diets.

There are also indirect effects of climate change that impact health, such as loss of employment and forced migration.

The implications of the draft GPS 2024 for health and health equity

The draft GPS 2024 takes an extremely narrow view of health, focusing solely on injury, with no mention of other pathways to health such as transport-related air pollution, physical inactivity and noise pollution.

Climate change is mentioned briefly, but the draft GPS 2024 does not offer



a plausible approach to reducing transport emissions and thus avoiding adverse health (and economic) consequences of transport emissions. Transport equity and exclusion are not mentioned at all.

The existing body of transport-health evidence suggests that the policies and approach outlined in the draft GPS 2024:

- May increase vehicle deaths and serious injuries.
- Will increase walking and cycling deaths and serious injuries.
- Will reduce transport-related physical activity.
- Will increase transport-sourced air pollution.
- May increase noise pollution.
- Will increase transport exclusion for a range of different groups.
- Will not achieve the post-2025 transport sector greenhouse gas emission budgets needed to achieve net zero by 2050 outlined in the Emissions Reduction Plan (in combination with other decarbonisation policies in transport).

Where to from here?

The health consequences of the current transport system are not inevitable; they are the result of specific policy choices.

We would argue that almost all the health harms of the current transport system are avoidable. And there are examples of other jurisdictions with

successful transport systems where health and wellbeing are a priority; injury rates are substantially lower, and transport-related physical activity higher than those in NZ.

Unfortunately, despite the evidence that health does not need to be compromised to achieve transport outcomes, the policy choices outlined in the draft GPS 2024 will perpetuate the extensive health harms from transport already present and risk worsening them.

In our submission, we made a wide range of recommendations for changes to the draft GPS 2024 to make health and wellbeing central to transport decision making.

However, fundamentally, if the transport system does not support New Zealanders to lead healthy and sustainable lives, then it cannot “effectively underpin NZs economic prosperity” in the 21st century.

Read in full at www.phcc.org.nz/briefing/governments-transport-plans-work-against-our-health.

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THE UZABUS 100-YEAR HERITAGE

The journey to the Uzabus operation we know today began in the Manawatu town of Shannon in the years following World War II.

Melvyn (Mel) Allan, a returning New Zealand Air Force serviceman, started Allan Motors with just three modest buses – a 1938 Chevrolet, a Morris, and a Reo Speedwagon.

The early years were challenging. During the 1950s, the business included a repair garage but like many small rural businesses, customers expected credit and cash flow became a problem. At best, payments were spasmodic and determined largely by the wool cheque payment which farmers relied on.

The conscious decision to buy buses with school runs was to ‘smooth out’ the flow of cash. Mel’s son John came from the building trade to join the Allan Motors business in the early 1960s, and adjacent operators Blair Motors and Murphy Motors were taken over and the fleet built up.

In 1977, Allan Motors made a significant leap forward with the acquisition of Madge Coachlines from the Smillie family, bringing with it a passenger transport heritage spanning back to 1920. This move added 35 vehicles to its fleet and cemented Allan Motors’ presence throughout the greater Manawatu region.

Subsequent acquisitions – including the long-established Rutherford Bus Co, and following its closure, the purchase of the Weld Motors Waldegrave Street depot in Palmerston North – further solidified the company’s position as a key player in the local transport landscape.

The purchase of Bay Coachlines in Whakatane in 1995, renamed Transbay Coaches, and later Kawerau Coaches, began the Allan’s expansion into the Bay of Plenty region. This was followed by the acquisition of Palmerston North Coachlines from the Fuller family in 1999.

In 2001, the company underwent a significant rebranding effort to unify its various fleets under a single brand identity with the adoption of the Uzabus name.

John’s son Justin, from the third generation of the Allan family, became a director in 2005. In 2007, Uzabus strengthened its operations in the Eastern Bay of Plenty with the acquisition of Ranui Buses in Opotiki.

The following year, 2008, Uzabus broadened its scope by acquiring Unique Holiday Tours, a veteran coach tour firm with over 30 years of experience offering guided tours of both the North and South Islands.

Further growth during 2015 added over 100 vehicles to the fleet; the acquisition of Tauranga-based Bayline Coaches expanded Uzabus’ footprint in the Bay of Plenty region.

In 2018, a new depot was opened in Paraparaumu to operate Kāpiti region’s Metlink Urban Services for the Greater Wellington Regional Council, marking yet another major milestone in the Uzabus journey.

John Allan admits to being ‘over 80’, but he’s happy to still be involved in the family business he has been part of since the 1960s.

He’s seen a lot of change in more than six decades in the industry – from the era when he and his father operated school buses along with sports trips, shopping trips and late-night cinema runs from a shed in Nathan Terrace Shannon to 2024 when Uzabus operates premium coaches on prestigious charter assignments from one of New Zealand’s most up-to-date depots.

Today, the senior management of the firm is Justin Allan at the helm as Managing Director, his sister Cathy focuses on all aspects of employment



JOHN ALLAN

and staff liaison, and her husband David McKay looks after all things ‘financial’.

Uzabus proudly remains one of the largest family-owned passenger transport businesses in New Zealand.

New Uzabus facilities show commitment to region and industry

When you take a look at the new Uzabus facilities in Tauranga’s Tauriko Industrial Estate, you quickly get the impression that the buildings were planned with people in mind.

And Managing Director Justin Allan confirms this.

“If the headwinds created by Covid taught us just one thing, it’s that staff, loyal staff are our greatest asset.

“Retaining staff in times of shortages is critical, so we’ve made a conscious effort to design a facility that is not only great to work in, but also meets the needs of inducting and training staff.”

Late in 2023, the operation moved three kilometres from their site in Greerton to Tauriko, ending more than 50 years of buses at Alach Street



THE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM AT UZABUS: (from left) David McKay, Cathy McKay and Justin Allan.



A FLUSH-MOUNTED 'SKY-LIFT' is a feature of the new Uzabus workshop at Tauranga's Tauriko Industrial Estate.

in several iterations: Tauranga Bus Service; Tauranga-Mt Maunganui Buses; Bayline; and Uzabus.

“We had well and truly outgrown our former site and this new 8,000 square metre site with offices, workshops and staff facilities provides parking for around 70 vehicles,” Justin adds.

“It means that we can now expand to beyond pre-Covid levels.”

This is the head office for a truly regional operation, from the Kāpiti Coast north through Horowhenua and Manawatu to the Eastern Bay of Plenty and in the Western Bay of Plenty as far north as Katikati.

The operation covers the full diversity of today’s bus and coach industry: school transport, commuter services, and charter work.

“We can now confidently go after growth in whatever sectors expand,” Justin says.

“We strive to achieve the role of preferred supplier in the regions we serve because our company ethos goes way beyond just providing a good, clean up-to-date vehicle – we believe if our staff feel valued and involved, then the clients and ultimately the passengers will too.

“Our mission statement is all about making the process easy for everyone involved.”

Big in-season Western Bay events such as Bay Dreams, Juicy Festival or One Love have been special high-profile assignments during peak holiday times.

And cruise ships berthing at the Port of Tauranga at Mount Maunganui take a good deal of preparation and planning many months ahead of the November to April season, including fleet vehicles specially sourced for the job.

A feature of the new workshop facilities is the flush-mounted Sky-Lift hoist supplied by Sulco, self-contained underbody cleaning facilities, panel and upholstery repair areas, and a full-size dedicated boardroom-style training room for both in-house trainers and external suppliers’ presentations.

“It has its origins from a very creative personalised plate” is how Justin explains where the Uzabus branding originated.

“Twenty or so years ago with so many different brands in the group, it became very difficult to manage the fleet without confusing the public, so we opted to re-brand to Uzabus which has made things easier as we have continued to expand.”

A recent public competition has added more taglines to the main brand

and these witty phrases have begun to appear on a wide range of fleet vehicles.

Author

ROB WEBB

Rob Webb is a communication’s specialist and freelance writer who has contributed numerous stories for *Circular* for a few years.



FIVE NEW DUAL-PURPOSE FOTON 50-seat coaches have been introduced to the fleet during recent months.



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