

Passenger Transport Benchmark Study

Purpose

This report:

- Provides comment on the recently completed Public Transport Benchmark Study tabled at the Auckland Council Transport Committee meeting of 6 September.
- Outlines recent performance in Auckland, and
- Illustrates the steps being taken by Auckland Transport to further progress Public Transport performance.

Background

The Auckland Regional Council commissioned a report to review public transport in Auckland relative to international comparators. A copy is attached as attachment 1. The Transport Committee of Auckland Council considered this paper in September 2011 and the Chairman 'has written to the Chief Executive (Attachment 2) highlighting discrepancies in the performance of passenger transport between Auckland and comparator cities.

Comments on the Passenger Transport Benchmark Study

The Auckland Passenger Transport performance benchmark study provides a comparison of the performance of public transport in Auckland city compared with other cities. Auckland Transport acknowledges the results of the study which highlight the significant challenges ahead if Auckland is to achieve the Auckland Plan's proposed transformational shift "to move to outstanding public transport within one network", and to deliver on the vision of becoming the world's most liveable city.

Whilst the comparisons provide a useful analysis of the public transport outputs, comparisons between cities are always problematic due to major contextual differences. Examples of the contextual differences are:-

- Auckland is a large region containing low density rural areas 2.61 persons per hectare and urban areas 23 persons per hectare making comparison difficult. Its topographical shape also lends itself less to effective public transport systems. For example the Auckland region at 4,894 km² is 64% larger than the Vancouver Translink service area of 2,977 km². This results in Auckland having a sprawling suburbia difficult to serve by public transport. Further the central isthmus of Auckland increases the transport challenges and associated costs.
- Integrated fares have been introduced in several of the comparison cities. The current transfer penalty between modes or operators suppresses multimodal or multi operator trips reducing the boarding count. It costs \$1.80 to board a bus even for part of a stage. To transfer between two different operators this is paid even if remaining within the same stage. The 2012 roll out of the Auckland Integrated Fares System will improve service integration and ease of transfer.
- Most of the comparator cities have had extensive modern electrified rail systems for many years while Auckland's redevelopment of rail is still underway.
- Melbourne has 12 rail lines, 27 tram lines, Brisbane 10 rail lines and 3 busways, Perth has 5 lines, Adelaide has 6 train lines a tram line and a busway (o-bahn), Auckland had 3 rail lines until the recently opened Onehunga line and 1 busway.
- The Manukau, Eastern and Onehunga lines are relatively short branch lines compared to the full length radial lines that exist in many comparator cities. Auckland needs to more than double its rail lines to match these cities.
- There is a fundamental difference between how New Zealand and USA, Australia and Canada treats taxation of employer provided parking and public transport and this creates some of the disparity in outcomes.

- Several of the cities used for benchmarking have long standing CBD parking levies not applied in Auckland.
- Auckland's fares were found in this study to be around 50% higher than the average fares in Canada and the USA and double that of Australia. The contracting model under which Auckland purchases public transport services is legislated and tender prices are set by market competition. The amount of competition and bids per contract has been the subject of much debate. NZTA has recently introduced a national target of 50% fare box recovery which may put upwards pressure on fares and make customer satisfaction scores for value for money even lower.
- Discussion with Mr Ian Wallis the author of the report, has indicated while he is confident of the basis for comparison of costs for New Zealand cities, he is less confident about North American comparator cities as information is not available consistently.
- Much of the current performance of public transport relates to historic under investment in public transport infrastructure, lack of parking constraints, a sprawling suburbia difficult to serve by public transport.
- Wellington rail has been electrified for some years. The operating and maintenance costs of electric trains are cheaper than those for a diesel fleet as used in Auckland. The electrification of Auckland's rail system will deliver operating costs savings. In addition:
 - Track access charges are lower in Wellington.
 - The Government is funding 50% of cost of new trains for Wellington.
 - The Auckland system, with its mixed fleet (SD and diesel locos) means Veolia has to hire drivers who can drive both types and so is less efficient as the wages cost are higher.
 - Auckland infrastructure (including Britomart) quality and support is better e.g. security at stations, station design, station maintenance but more costly. These are fixed costs so that as patronage increases efficiency will be greater.
 - Auckland's costs include insurance premiums for rail assets (rolling stock and stations). KiwiRail (Wellington) has traditionally self-insured its assets and only taken out public liability insurance.
- Wellington has a strong CBD which is the dominant employment centre in the region. In contrast Auckland's employment is dispersed over a number of centres which makes provision of PT services less cost effective.
- Wellington's urban form has been confined historically to valley lines resulting in linear catchments suited to linear rail services.

Recent Performance in Auckland

Auckland has been recovering from a very low level of public transport performance and has in recent years achieved some significant gains. In March 2011 passenger transport usage reached the 7 million milestone for the first time in many decades with more than 1 million passengers boarding trains. This has been achieved by significant changes, with some of the more notable ones being upgrading of the rail stations; the addition of many new buses and several new ferries to the fleet in recent years; ferry wharves have been upgraded and refurbished; the new inner and outer link services have been launched; and the Onehunga Branch line has reopened. Figure 1 below shows patronage, operating costs and service kilometres over the last decade and highlights the reduction in operating costs while maintaining patronage growth and service kilometres since the study was undertaken.

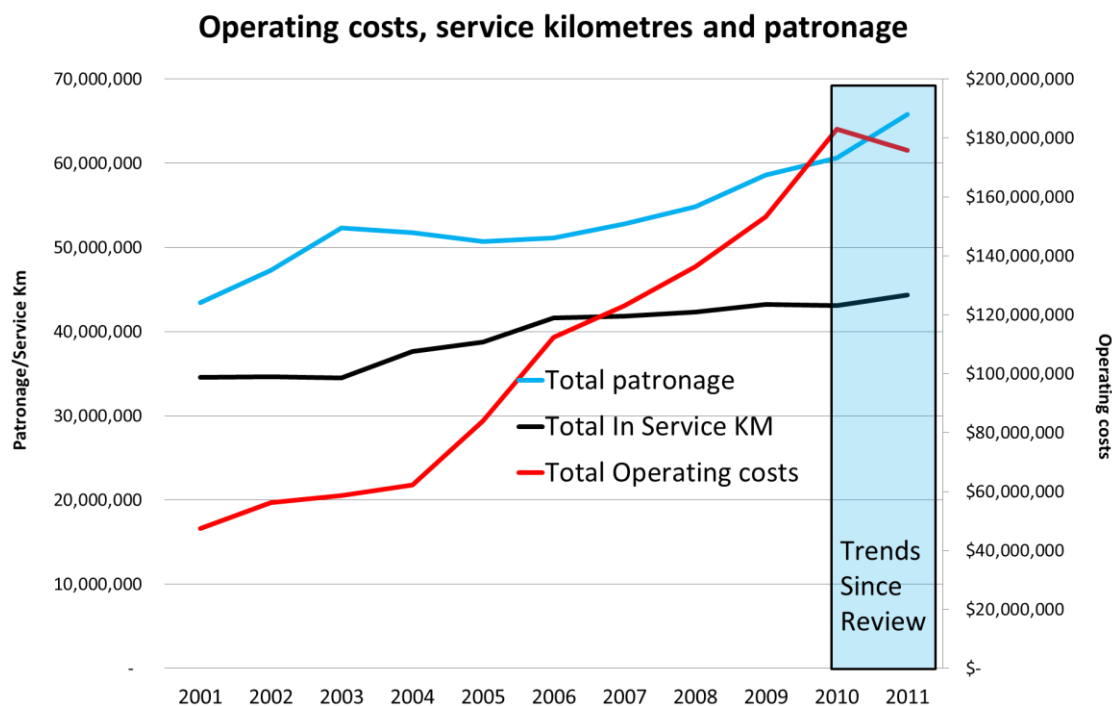


Figure 1: Operating Costs, Service Levels and Patronage Trends

Auckland's Future Direction

The draft Auckland Plan sets out a vision for Auckland to become “the world’s most liveable city by 2040” with five “transformational shifts” to achieve the vision including a Move to outstanding public transport within one network. This provides Auckland with the long term strategic direction to improve public transport many other of the comparator cities have had in place.

To achieve this, Auckland transport has included a programme to develop the passenger transport services in the draft 10 year Long Term Plan. These are intended to drive better performance and increased patronage and our ability to deliver will depend on the degree to which these are approved. Some of the more important projects which are either underway or planned for the coming 3 years are:-

- Auckland Transport has contracted for the provision of the Electric Motor Units which will enhance the train service performance and reduce train operating costs.
- The Auckland Integrated Fares System will be rolled out in 2012 following its initial phase prior to Rugby World Cup – this will also increase patronage, reduce operating costs and improve reliability by reducing boarding times.
- Auckland Transport is progressing the route protection for the City Rail Link with a target to commission the link within the next ten years.
- The Manukau spur line will be completed.
- Auckland Transport will be implementing further RTN and QTN infrastructure improvements as funds and resources allow, most notably AMETI has been re-scoped to RTN standards to provide a high quality public transport service. The provision of an RTN interchange at Botany will be pursued. Planning will start for the RTN connection from Botany to Manukau Centre. Bus priority measures connecting Flatbush to Manukau Centre are also under investigation.
- Working in partnership with NZTA, KiwiRail, Auckland Council and the Airport Company to identify and protect rail rapid transit to the airport along with other multimodal improvements.

- The progressive roll out of park and ride schemes including in Manukau Centre and at Silverdale.
- The public transport operating model (PTOM) for procuring public transport services has been reviewed and the new PTOM is expected to provide better performance and increase commercial pressure

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Auckland Transport Board:

- Receives this report
- That it be noted that the Chief Executive will be responding to the letter from the Chairman of Auckland Council Transport Committee in line with this report's direction.

Attachments

Attachment 1 - Auckland Passenger Transport Performance Benchmark Study - Final Report (provided as a separately bound document)

Attachment 2 - Letter from Chairman, Auckland Council transport committee dated 8 September

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