

Sins of the Fathers: - the fall and rise of rail transit in Auckland



Presentation by Mike Lee, Chairman, Auckland Regional Council
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Sins of the fathers – the decline and rise of rail transit in Auckland

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“The iniquities of the fathers are visited on the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation”
Exodus 34:6 7= Deuteronomy 5:8 10

Abstract

Auckland, New Zealand notable for its superb geographic setting on two harbours and the magnificent Hauraki Gulf is also known as ‘the City of Sails’. Considered one of the finest recreational boating centres in the world, the city of nearly 1.4 million where nearly one third of New Zealanders live is also notorious for urban sprawl and chronic traffic congestion. Auckland is also, as Melbourne academic Paul Mees has dubbed it, the ‘City of Cars’. Problems with traffic congestion go back as far as most Aucklanders can remember – that is nearly sixty years. Conventional wisdom citing Aucklanders’ deep attachment to the private motor vehicle asserts ‘*You will never get Aucklanders out of their cars*’. However this paper reveals rather surprisingly, that up until the mid 1950s, reputedly car-loving Aucklanders were most diligent public transport users and, in terms of per capita patronage Auckland was one of the best public transport cities in the world. A curtain of collective amnesia hangs over this critical mid-century period when far reaching decisions were made by a transit-hostile central government and conservative city fathers. These decisions, taken consciously radically altered the development and shape of the city for years to come. Auckland’s move from transit to individual cars is not unique – especially in Australasia - but Auckland is one of the most extreme cases of this mid-20th century phenomenon. A trend which Melbourne successfully resisted.

This paper will review the dramatic decline of public transport patronage in Auckland though the second half of the 20th century. The paper will conclude however on an optimistic note – reporting a significant upturn in public transport contemporaneous with growing infrastructure investment by local, regional and central governments which have enabled the beginnings of a renaissance of rail in Auckland.

Title Page – ‘Sins of the Fathers’ – introduction – the Auckland Regional Council group is the regional authority, planning, parks and public transport agency for the Auckland region – home to nearly 1.4m people, one third of NZ’s population.

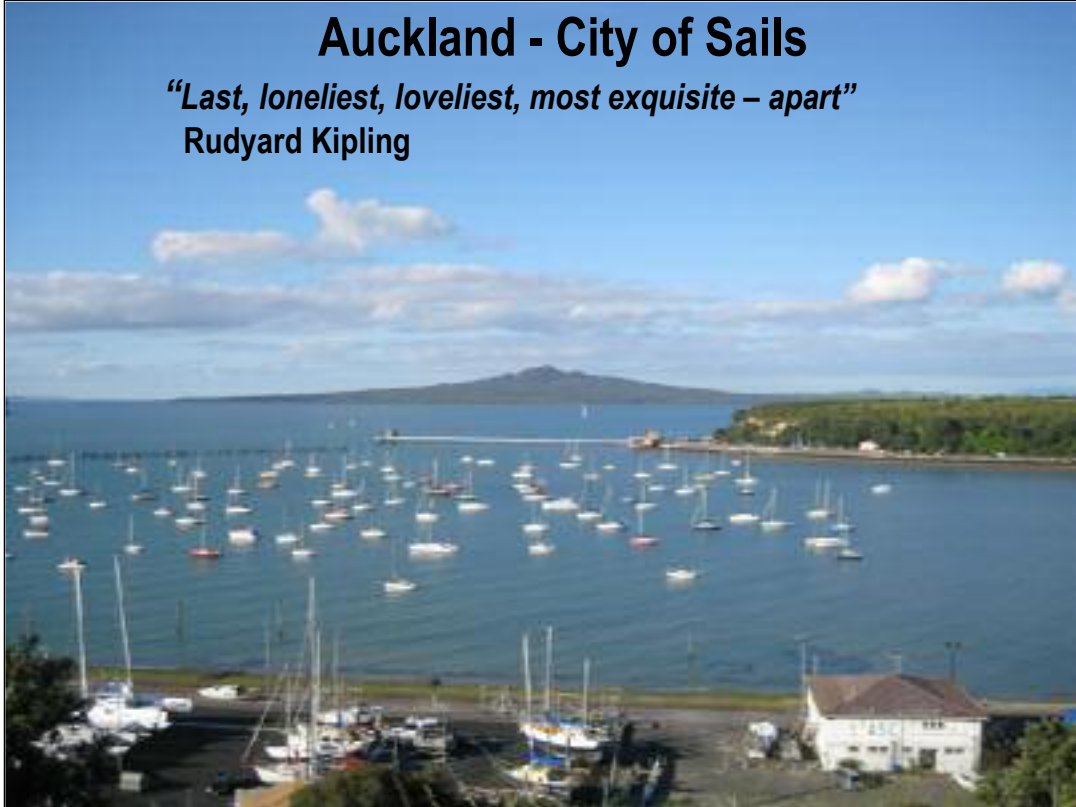


2. Auckland – Harbour City and site of New Zealand’s largest port – a benign climate, superb harbours and Hauraki Gulf with hundreds of magnificent beaches – a picturesque landscape dotted with more than 50 volcanic cones.

Auckland - City of Sails

“Last, loneliest, loveliest, most exquisite – apart”

Rudyard Kipling

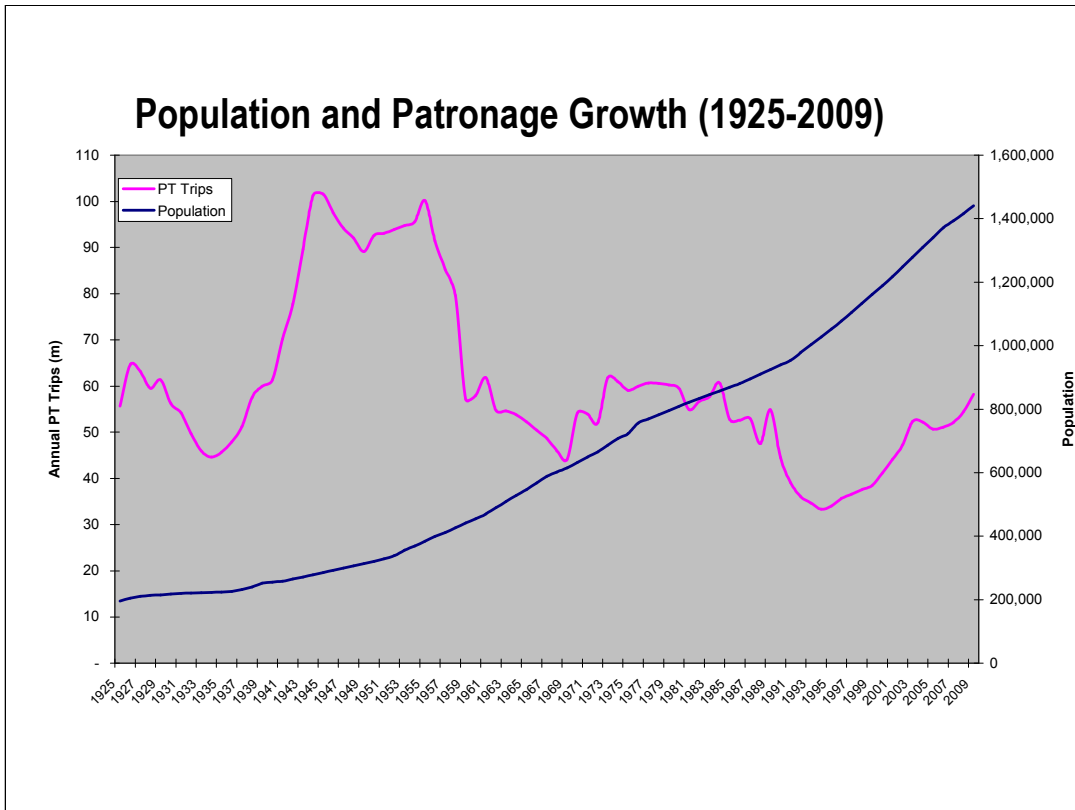


3. Auckland – City of Sails – considered one of the finest recreational boating centres in the world as Rudyard Kipling described it *“last, loveliest, loneliest – exquisite apart.”*

Auckland - City of Cars



4. Auckland – is also a sprawling ‘City of Cars’ as aptly described by Melbourne transport expert Paul Mees in his latest book *Transport for suburbia*.

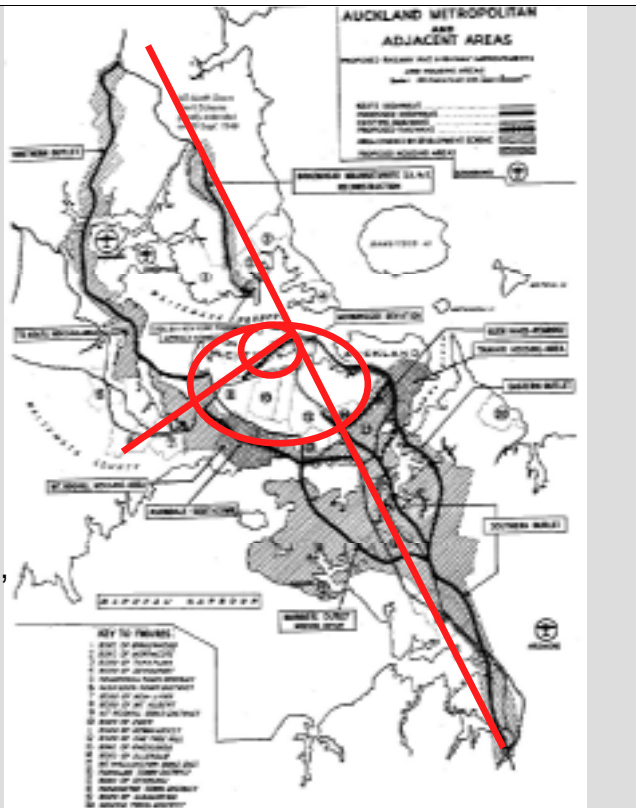


5. Graph. Auckland PT Patronage versus Population over time – note levels in 1950s.

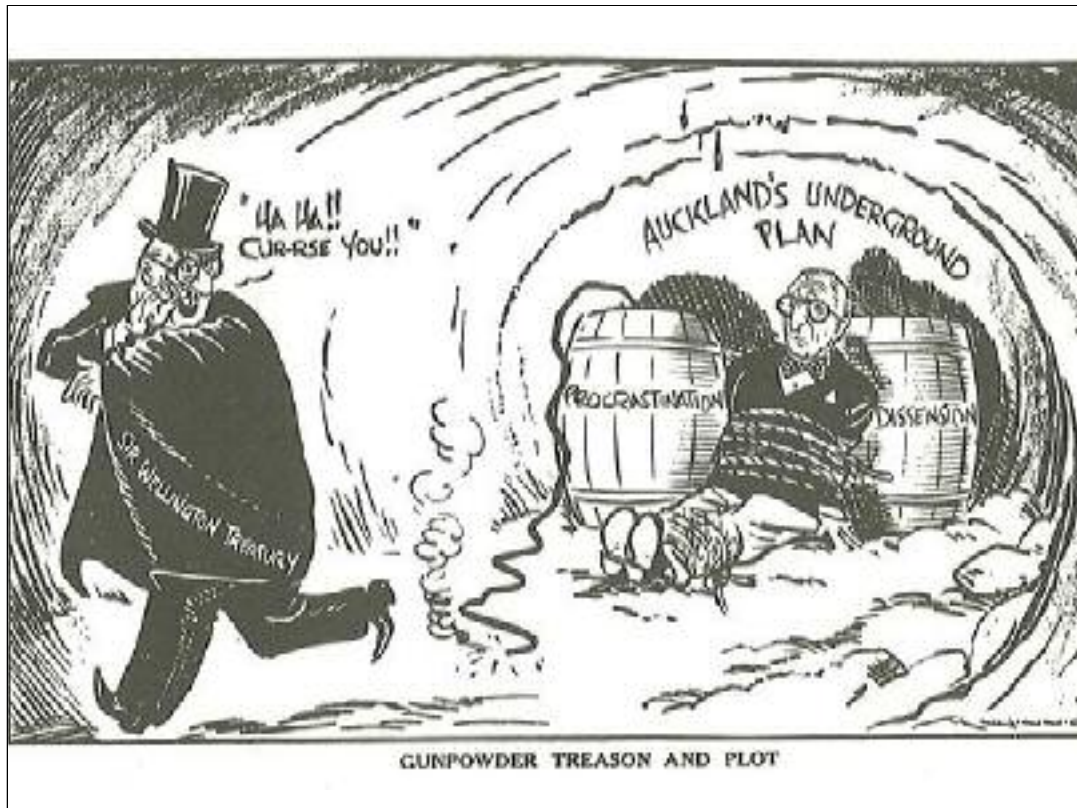
NZ Ministry of Works Transport plan for Auckland

Expansion of
Auckland Rail network
and electrification
outlined in plans by
Ministry of Works
- abandoned in 1950's

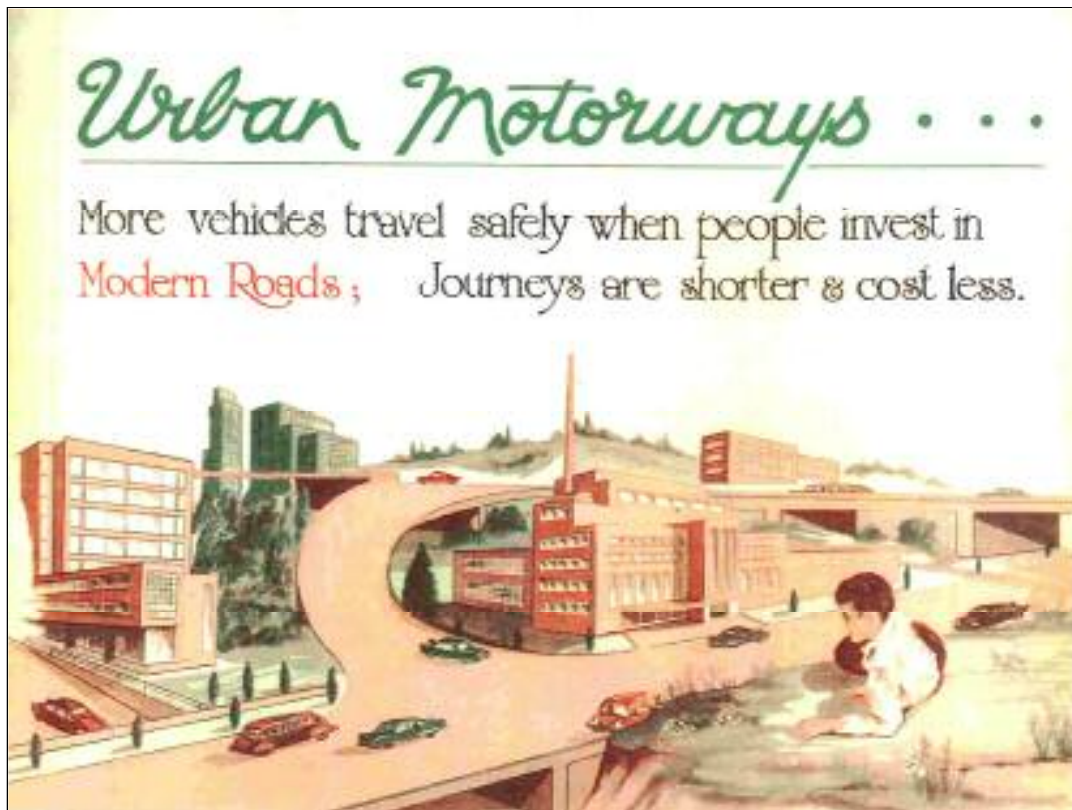
Appendix to the Journals
of the House of Representatives,
1946



6. 1946 Auckland rail plan. After the World War II major plans put in place for Auckland rail. Wellington rail was electrified in the 1940s – Melbourne as early as the 1920s. This is the NZ Ministry of Works 1946 rail plan for Auckland – this expansive plan included electrification, an underground inner city loop (which had been promised by central government since 1924) and an overground suburban western loop. These plans, reinforced by a Halcrow report of 1950 were eventually cancelled by agreement between the new National government and Auckland City Council in 1954.



7. Coincidentally with the agreed cancellation of the rail project in what suspiciously looked like a trade-off, the next day the government agreed to build a harbour bridge. However the bridge was built with only 4 lanes with no capacity for rail. The State Highway 1 motorway originally planned to go around the city was driven straight through the city to connect to the new bridge – causing enormous destruction and dislocation to long established inner city suburbs. The harbour bridge which opened in 1959 reached capacity very quickly and four extra lanes (the Nippon Clip-on') had to be added in the late 1960s.

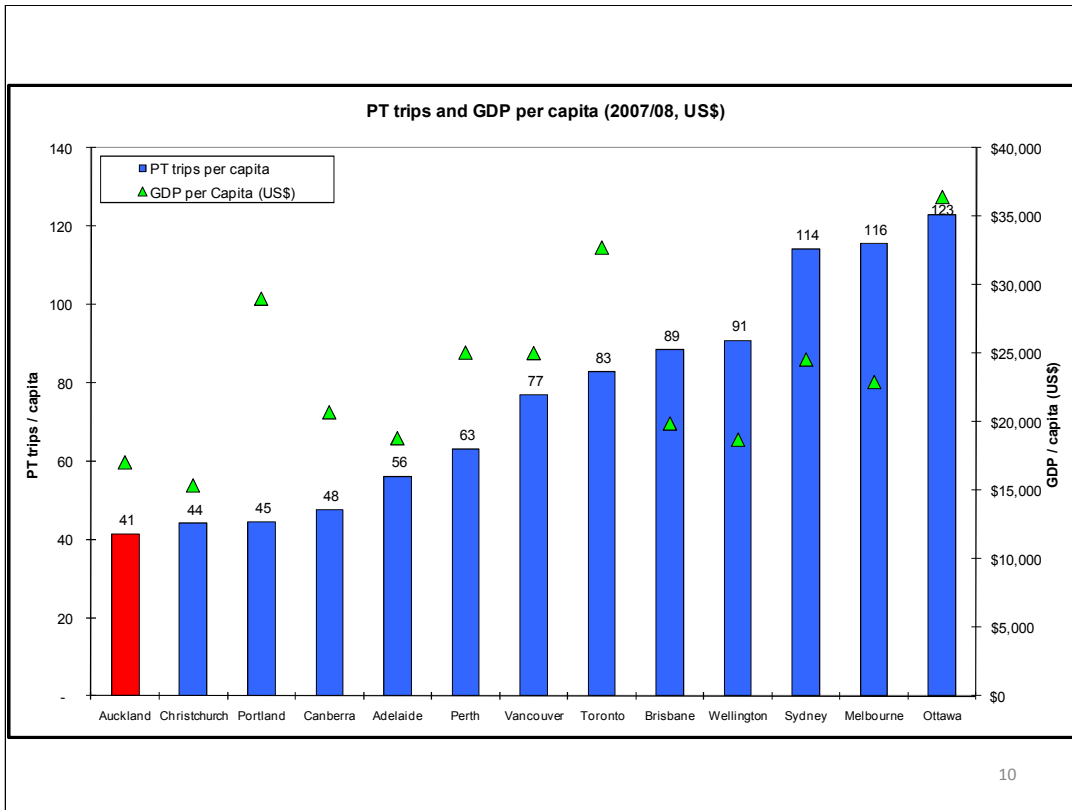


8. Based on the post-war assumption of almost limitless resources of cheap petrol, a far-reaching decision was made to focus transport totally on motorways (freeways) in Auckland and to virtually abandon rail. This reinforced a political/philosophical change to a less planned approach to city building and national development. This approach was very much driven by vested interests and by land speculation and resulted in sprawling subdivisions characteristic of modern Auckland.

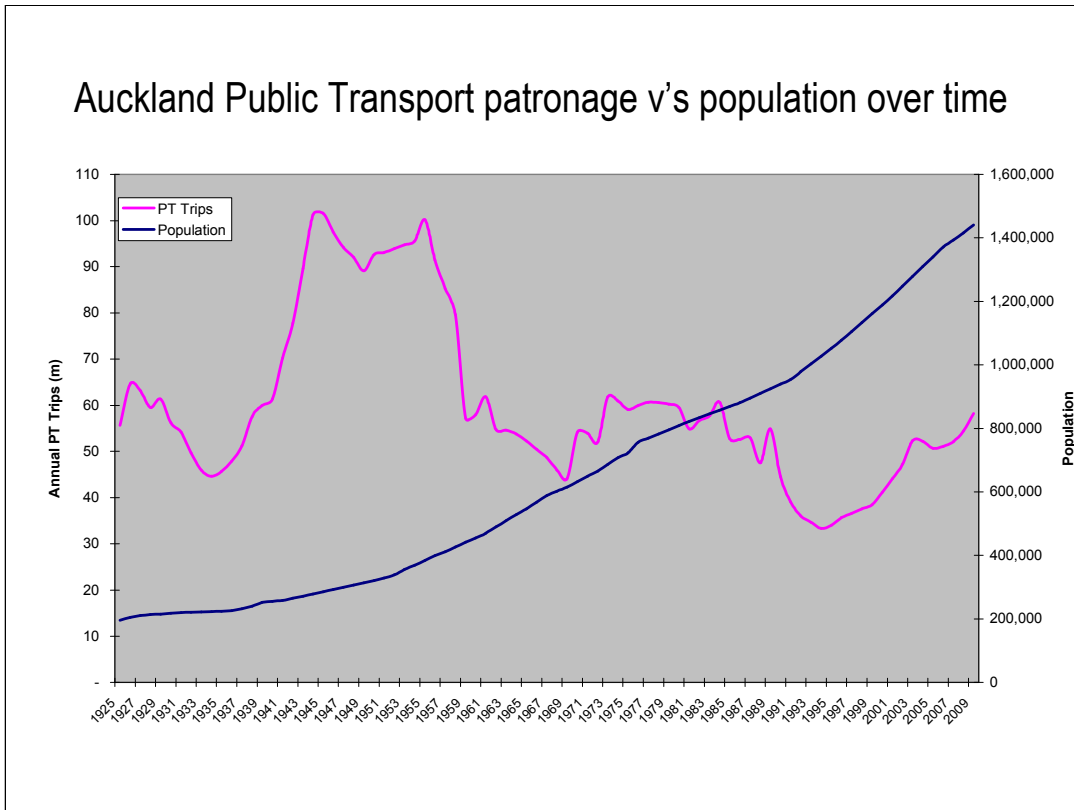
The Inevitable Result



9. The inevitable result – grid lock...and urban sprawl. Road congestion according to business lobby groups costing in lost time and wasted fuel nearly a billion dollars a year. Their answer - more roads not more public transport. Meanwhile Auckland's 200km of rail corridors lay neglected.



10. Public transport patronage. These critical decisions in the mid 1950s, compounded a generation later in the mid 70s and again during the neo-liberal era of the 80s and 90s led to a virtual collapse of public transport usage in Auckland. – Auckland’s per capita PT patronage is the worst of any major city in Australasia and Canada.



11. But also note again patronage graph over time – note the amazing peak in the 1940s and 1950s - over 100m trips per year. Yet note the population in Auckland in 1950s was only less than 400,000. Note that the present population of Auckland is now about one million greater than in 1950s and yet public transport patronage is now only 58m trips per year – just over half!! Just what was going on in Auckland in the 1950s?

Auckland's Electric Tram System



Auckland's tramways 72 km network - over 80 million pax per year

12. Auckland's tramway network – a 72 km network reaching its peak in 1939 with an astonishing patronage of over 80 million passengers per year. New Zealand's World War II mobilisation military and economic and meant little or no new investment was available for civic infrastructure especially for renewing and expanding trams and tramways.



Electric trams in Auckland's Queen Street – mid 1950s

- 13. Auckland's electric tram system – almost completely forgotten in modern Auckland – and has been almost completely overlooked by historians and contemporary transport researchers.**

Electric tram era ends - December 1956

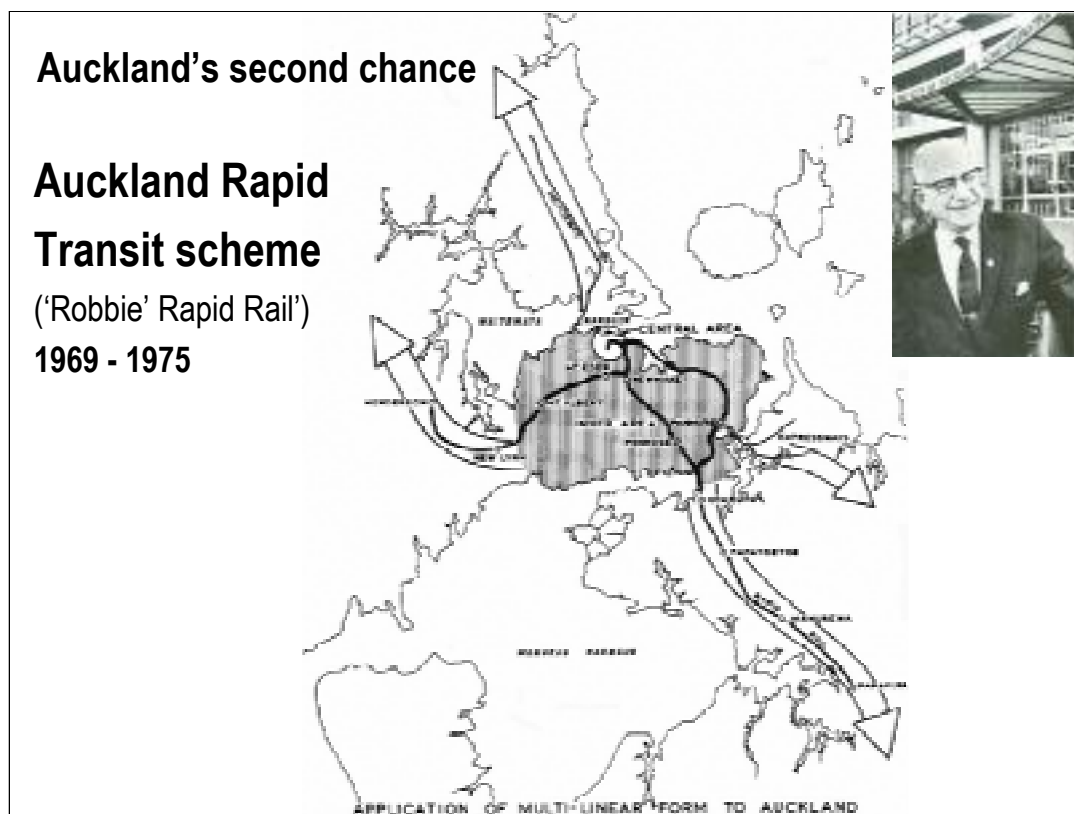


Auckland's public transport patronage up until this point was over 100,000,000 passenger trips per annum

14. Trams were hugely popular amongst Aucklanders as the spontaneous crowd scenes of Aucklanders farewelling them remind us. Pre 1960s New Zealanders were more unquestioning of their leaders than today and assumed the Auckland's city fathers knew what they were doing.



15. Little is remembered about the tramways – a curtain of amnesia was drawn across that era — but once the decision was taken to withdraw the trams – the rails were ripped out with a ruthless determination and at substantial cost. Auckland’s city fathers were determined that there should be no competition to the private motorcar – save for diesel buses. Auckland in regard to transport strategy, decided to imitate Los Angeles but whereas auto-centric L.A. evolved by chance – Auckland’s car-dominant transport configuration was the outcome of deliberate, conscious decisions. I suppose in ‘government speak’ this destruction could be called ‘hard nosed’ but it was incredibly stupid. Perhaps the remarkable amnesia about Auckland’s electric tramway system was originally prompted by a collective guilt at this astonishing vandalism.



16. By the late 1960s the inevitable consequence of these decisions – notably in terms of traffic congestion had begun to impact on the city. It was realised belatedly by more enlightened leaders that Auckland had made a huge mistake in the 1950s. The Auckland Regional Authority and NZ Rail produced a Rapid Rail scheme. The scheme became associated with for the founder chairman of the ARA and 6 times mayor of Auckland Dove Meyer Robinson who so tirelessly advocated it. ‘Robbie’s Rapid Rail’ however just as with previous schemes it was turned down by the Muldoon National Government early in 1976.

Auckland Rapid Transit Scheme 1974

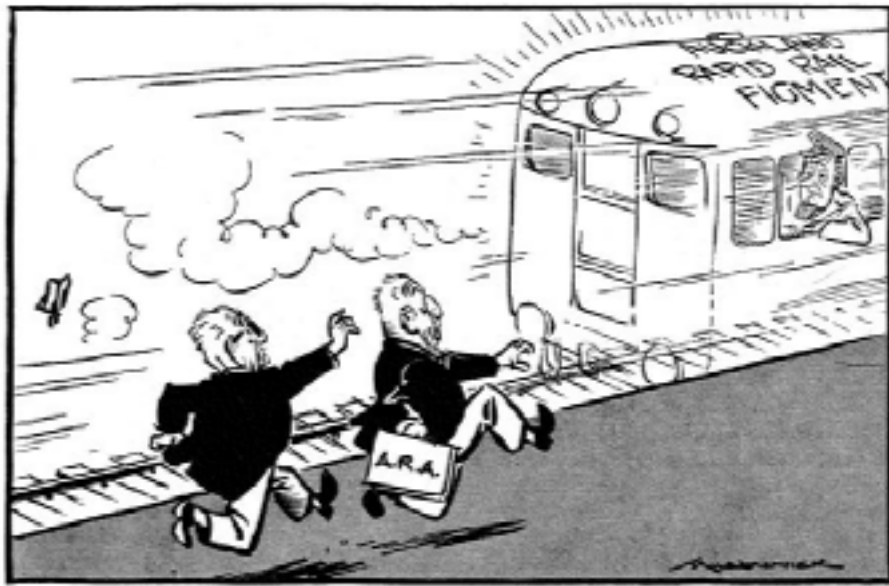
What might have been.

An artist's concept of an electric multiple unit at Downtown Station as proposed for the Auckland Rapid Transit System in 1974.

Source: George Bridges Collection



17.



THE GHOST TRAIN

July 9, 1915

Post Office

17b.



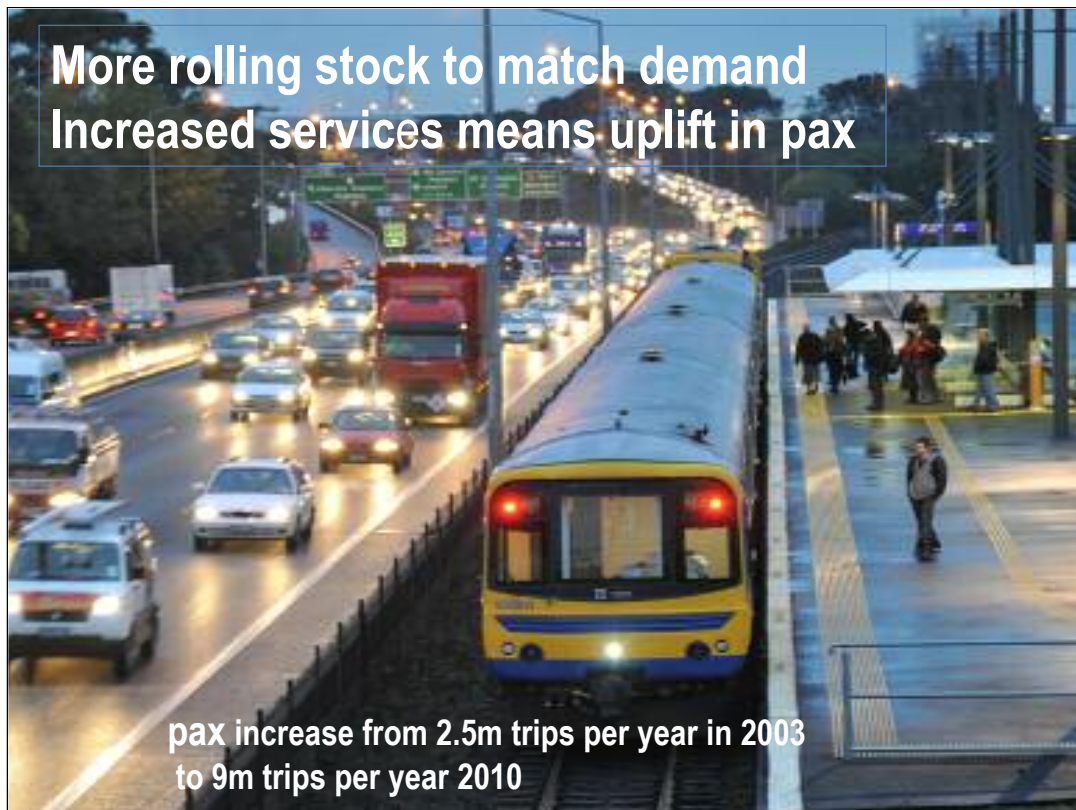
18. By year 2000 – 25 years - a generation - had passed. By then mistakes made in the 1950s and again a generation later in the 1970s had been compounded by New Zealand's extreme Neo Liberal experiment. Thatcher style – bus deregulation preceded the government ordered privatisation of Auckland's publicly owned bus company – painstakingly built up in the 1960s and 70s by the Auckland Regional Authority. In the early 2000s congestion became so chronic that even the most hardened motorway lobby groups conceded the need for better public transport - though most investment went into completing what is known as the CMJ (Central Motorway Junction) or to most Aucklanders as Spaghetti Junction. As Paul Mees describes it in his latest book *"Auckland is a city of cars. Its transport system is untouched by the environmental activism for which New Zealanders are renowned. The CBD is bounded to the north by the harbour, but on all other sides by a gigantic spaghetti junction, the largest in Australasia. The three motorways which feed into the junction debouch into the city centre, jamming it with cars and buses for most of the day."* The CMJ Spaghetti Junction could be described as the crowning achievement of the pro-roads – anti transit political leaders and planners of the 1950s and onwards.

Public Transport Revival - Britomart Transport Centre – opened 2003



'Build it and they will come' – rail station in CBD

19. Public transport revival. Britomart Transport Centre – built by Auckland City Council opened in 2003 – rail extended to inner city. For a number of reasons over the last 10 years including a more public transport sympathetic Labour government, a definitely more sympathetic regional council, fuel price spikes, road congestion, concerns about peak oil and the aspirations of a more sophisticated, liberal, urban population, has meant, despite ponderously slow decision-making, the beginnings of a revival in rail transit in Auckland.



20. 'Build it and they will come' - Aucklanders respond.

Rail patronage increases from 2.5 million trips per annum in 2003 to 9 million in 2010

To keep pace with public demand during ongoing attempts to persuade central government to support electrification. ARC group has financed a fleet of refurbished diesel rolling stock – 148 cars including :

24 x SA/SD 6 carriage sets (loco hauled),

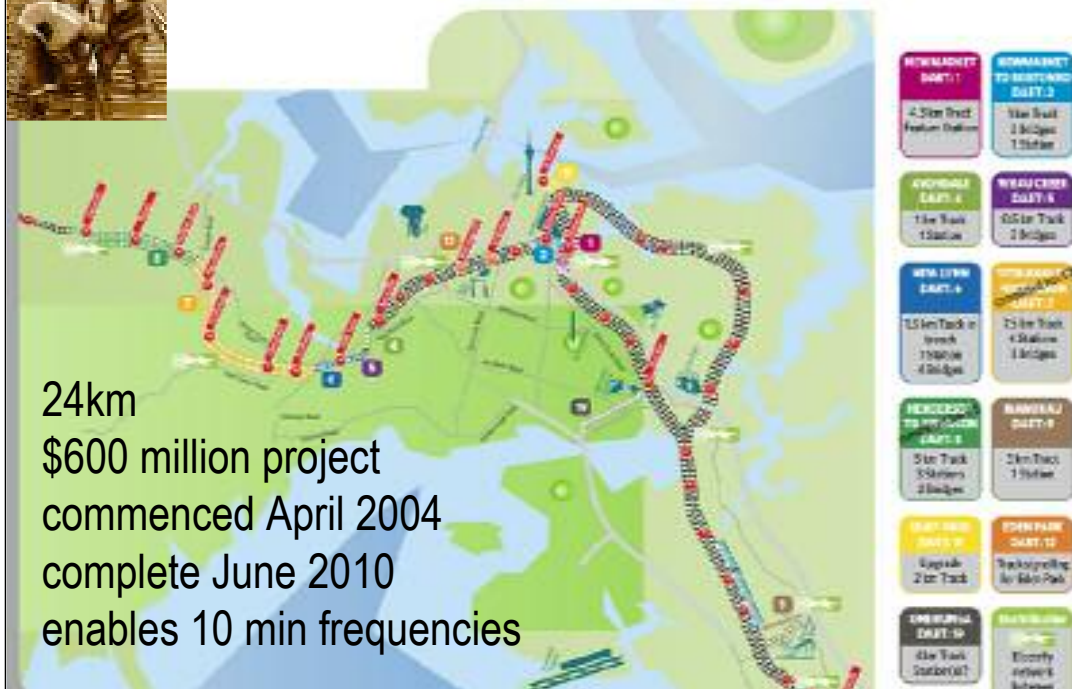
10 x ADL/ADC DMUs (ex Perth)

5 x ADK/ADB DMUs (ex Perth)

1 x SX train – ex Queensland



Double Tracking Western Line



21. The Western Line double tracking including technically difficult New Lynn trench and major grade-separated transport interchange \$165m KiwiRail \$30m local govt. Commenced by ARC in 2004 taken over by Central Government in 2005. Due to be completed by KiwiRail in June 2010.



22. Newmarket Station at Newmarket Junction is the second busiest rail station in Auckland network. Opened in January it was the 21st new station in the Auckland network. Grafton Station was opened in April and three new stations are being built on the Onehunga Branch Line which is to be reopened in September. A major new rail bus interchange is being built around grade separated New Lynn station to be opened in September



Trains on rubber tyres



24. North Shore Bus way

Opened in February 2008 costing \$300m 9km in length with five busway stations with free park and ride.

5,100 cars taken off motorway and harbour bridge.

Over 1.7 million passengers recorded using the Northern Express over the last 12 months, an increase of 18.8 per cent on the same period last year.

Integrated Ticketing (smart card) deal signed
December 2009 with Thales (ARTA & NZTA)



Integrated smart card ticket transferable between bus, rail, harbour ferries

Electrification of Auckland rail - approved at last!

Cleaner, quieter, faster EMUs
Future proofs Auckland rail system

- sub 10 min frequencies
- CBD tunnel
- Quieter operation - urban intensification
- Environmentally sustainable
 - improved air quality
 - ability to use renewable energy
 - Faster than diesel!
- Government commits to completing Auckland Electrification - \$500m to purchase electric rolling stock:
 - 38 EMUs (114 cars) plus 3 spares
 - 12 Electric locomotives (plus 1 spare)
 - \$500m catenary,, substations, signalling, civil engineering



26

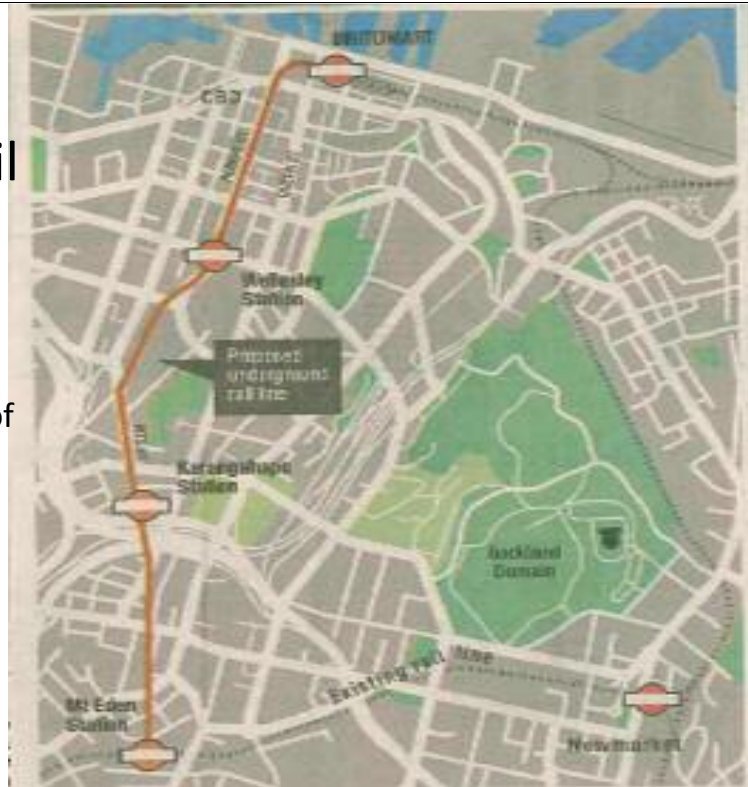
23. Electrification - Billion dollar project announced by Labour Govt May 2007 confirmed by National Govt Dec 2009.

\$500m rolling stock etc \$500m catenary, power substations, civil engineering. EOI by Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) commenced December 2008 – RSP process suspended by new Government March 2009. Electrification decision reviewed and given over to Government owned KiwiRail. EOI/RSP process again underway. Successful tender to be announced at end of year – some 60 years after original Auckland electrification plan.

the next step...

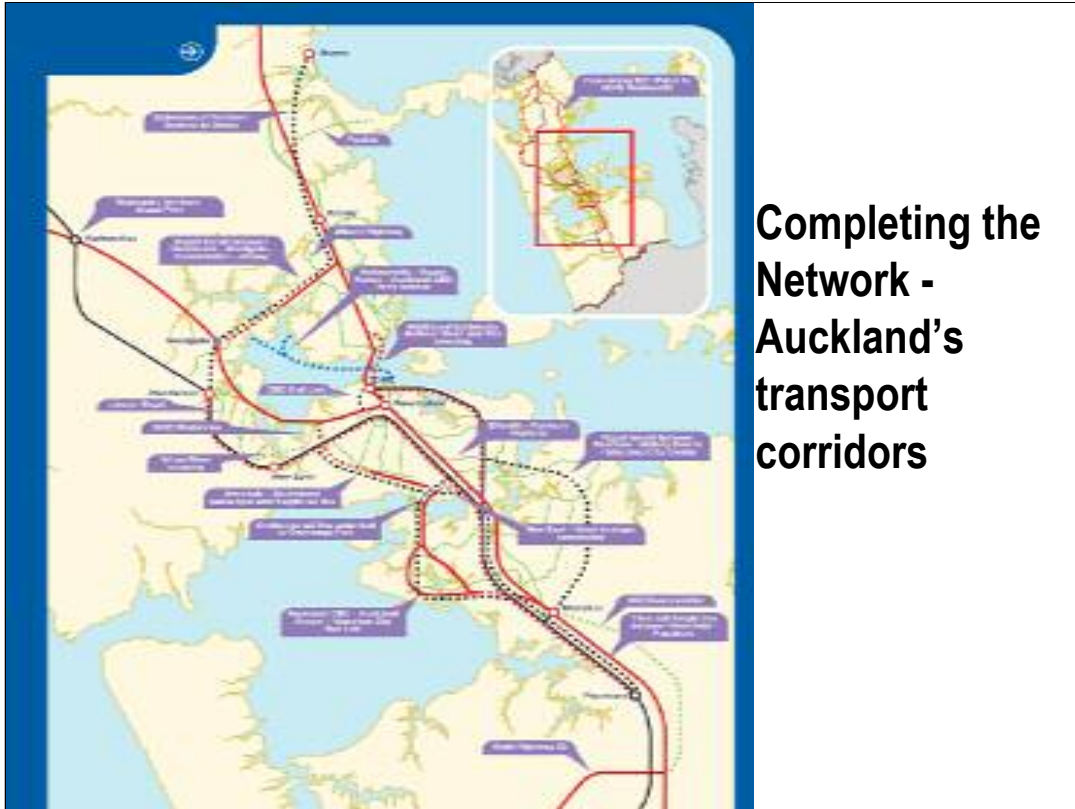
CBD Loop Rail Tunnel

preferred route identified – business case to government by end of year.



25. CBD loop tunnel – costing about \$1 billion would almost double train capacity through Britomart station and revitalise the inner city. Increase rail accessibility to CBD to within 30 mins for half million people.

Preferred route has identified by KiwiRail and region. Business case goes to government in November.



Completing the Network - Auckland's transport corridors

26. Completing the network – Double tracking of western line – Recommissioning Onehunga Branch Line – new Manukau rail spur – rail to Auckland international airport. Rail and Road harbour crossing tunnels. Avondale – Southdown suburban rail loop. Southeast rail loop.

Auckland's Seven deadly sins

- Failure to electrify and expand Auckland's rail system in the 1950's
- Trading the rail scheme for a four lane – cars only – harbour bridge
- Compounding that error by diverting the State Highway 1 motorway through central city instead of around it
- Withdrawal of popular electric trams and destruction of Auckland's tramway
- Failure to approve Auckland Rapid Rail scheme (mid 1976)
- Deregulation of Public (bus) Transport (1989)
- Privatisation of Auckland's NZ rail (1993) and forced privatisation of Auckland regional bus company (1998)

27.

Public Transport Hero

Sir Robert Risson

Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board 1949 – 1970

Saviour of Melbourne Trams



28. While Auckland's city fathers and central government were making a series of disastrous decisions catastrophic for rail transit – Melbourne was singularly fortunate to have Sir Robert Risson – a retired Australian Army general who served in World War II at Tobruk and in New Guinea. Chairman of the Melbourne and Metropolitan tramway board for two vital decades - it was Risson, by all accounts a remarkable and forceful character, who saved Melbourne's trams. One imagines his military experience was useful for him in successfully defending Melbourne's trams and routing the arrayed forces of the car/oil lobby which prevailed everywhere else in Australasia – especially in Auckland. Melbourne should raise a statue to him.

Thanks to Australasian Railway Association



Auckland
Regional Council
TE RAUHĪTANGA TAIAO

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