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The prospects for improving public transport in Auckland

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Abstract

In many cities of the World, transport systems continue to focus on private vehicle travel, to the detriment of public transport use. This inclination towards providing for private vehicle travel then makes it difficult to effectively improve public transport systems. This thesis has sought to investigate this transport trend further, exploring the factors integral to public transport success. In working towards this, focus has been placed on addressing the public transport system itself by investigating the service provision elements of public transport. In working towards this, network planning was used to examine how the public transport system itself holds the key to its own success. By undertaking an in-depth analysis into the Auckland public transport network, it was shown that when applied, network planning has the potential to improve the existing public transport system.

Preface

Since 2008, over half the World's population were living in urban areas, with this figure only set to increase into the future (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). This continued increase in urban population makes it integral to provide a quality transport system to meet the needs of citizens. In most instances though, this transport system has been provided by focusing on road transport. As such, private vehicles have become the primary travel mode used by citizens (Ewing, 1997; Kokaz, 2001). Cities favouring private vehicles however, have resulted in segmented, decentralised and sprawling cities (Barton, 1992). This works to make private vehicle travel a necessity, with this occurring at the expense of public transport (Laird, Newman, Bachels, & Kenworthy, 2001). The inclination to favour private vehicle travel has made reversing this travel trend a formidable task for transport planners.

The poor performance of public transport in many World cities continues to be justified using the characteristics of a city. Common arguments validating public transport failure include 'the population is too spread out' (Huxley, 1995) or 'people prefer to travel using private vehicles' (Tertoolen, Van Kreveld, & Verstraten, 1998). These factors though are outside the control of the public transport system itself and require a long-term planning approach to change. This makes it expensive, time-consuming and difficult to change these factors to improve public transport. As a result, the poor performance of public transport continues to be tolerated in many cities that lack the necessary characteristics.

Auckland, New Zealand is a city that has provided a transport system focusing on road transport. As a direct result, this city of 1.3 million people (Statistics New Zealand, 2006a) is dominated by private vehicle travel. For instance, over eighty-seven percent of journeys to work are made using private vehicles. This is occurring to the detriment of public transport, which caters for only seven percent of all journey to work trips (Statistics New Zealand, 2006b). Auckland too validates the poor performance of public transport by using its city characteristics. As a result, this poor public transport performance continues to be tolerated.

This thesis seeks to practically address this dominant transport trend. As such, the principle aim of this thesis is:

- To investigate policy approaches which will improve the existing public transport system in Auckland.

The central idea behind this thesis is that the public transport system itself holds the key to its own success. This is regardless of the city characteristics present. In exploring this idea,

network planning – an approach focusing on the public transport system itself will be investigated. This investigation will focus on Auckland, asking the question as to whether network planning has the potential to improve public transport in the city.

To achieve this, the thesis has been organised into seven chapters. Chapter one introduces the need of successful urban public transport, working to uncover the key influencers to its success in a city. Chapter two reviews existing literature relating to the network planning approach, seeking to better understand network planning while discussing in detail the key elements needed for its success. Chapter three will set out the thesis methodology that will be adopted to achieve the aim, objective and research questions of this thesis. Chapter four will investigate the institutional history of Auckland's public transport network. Chapter five will investigate in detail the current state of Auckland's public transport system. Chapter six will discuss the findings of chapters four and five, while working to compare this against the findings of the literature and analysis. Chapter seven will make conclusions and key recommendations for the thesis.

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Furthermore, this project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. As such, it has been granted approval for a low-risk ethics notification to undertake the required fieldwork.

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