

**MAKING TRANSPORT INCLUSIVE**

**Immigrant Communities Everyday Experience of Public Transport in  
Auckland**



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# 1. INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT COMMUNITIES

## ABSTRACT

*Auckland is facing rapid population growth and increasing ethnic diversity. Transport planning policies can benefit from understanding the values and customs that are the basis for travel, by the ethnic population in Auckland. This paper is a part of the bigger research project examining immigrants' perceptions and the need for public transport in Auckland. The objectives of this research are twofold: (1) identify new factors that would increase better public transport patronage in Auckland, and (2) examine the extent to which public transport usage is contingent upon socio-cultural values. This paper particularly explores the everyday experiences of public transport in Auckland by immigrants originally from the Indian sub-continent. Adopting a qualitative approach, two community leaders were selected for detailed interviews, and one focus group discussion was organised to get insights into community perspectives on public transport in Auckland. Open-ended questions were asked in interviews and focus group discussions, asking participants to describe their experience of transport in general and public transport in particular in Auckland. The key findings reveal the distinctive perceptions and needs of the Indian sub-continent immigrants surrounding public transport services and image in Auckland. The service issues include: better convenience and reliability, and cost-effectiveness and safety of public transport. Data shows that the status of trains over buses and the status of people using public transport also influence positive or negative perceptions of Indian sub-continent immigrants in Auckland. The findings highlight opportunities to incorporate immigrants' aspirations of affordable fares, greater time savings, improved convenience and a positive image of the public transport in Auckland. Research suggests that public transport infrastructure and service design must recognise a people-centred approach and sensitivities relative to a particular community. Overall, this research comments on the need for public transport planning to recognise how different ethnic groups respond to specific modes of transport in distinctive socially determined ways.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION: TRANSPORT JUSTICE, IMMIGRANTS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 emphasises making cities, inclusive and sustainable. It sets a target of providing safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems to the needs of the socially disadvantaged population by 2030. This goal demands people living in cities become less dependent on the private car. This is particularly the case for New Zealand, who have one of the highest car ownership rates per capita and one of the largest per capita carbon emission levels in the world (Productivity Commission 2018). However, NZ cities, especially Auckland, are historically planned around car and the challenges of public transport development as everyday transport choice for women, older, low income and the immigrant population, are profound.

The recent literature on transport and mobilities research, focuses on the concept of mobility and transport justice. For example, Mimi Sheller's 2018 monograph, "Mobility Justice", Nancy Cook and David Butz's 2019 edited collection, "Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social justice" and Martens' (2017) "fair transportation", are few examples where they focus on rights and fairness to transport. According to Sheller (2018, 29), "Mobility justice"- "concerns overturning marginalisation and disadvantage through intentional inclusion of the excluded in decision making and elimination of unfair privilege. It puts "oppressed" and "disenfranchised" groups front and center".

Elderly, women, youth, disabled, immigrants and low-income people are recognised as "oppressed" and "disenfranchised" groups and as being the most 'transport disadvantaged' (Currie et al. 2009). Hurni (2005) argues that transport disadvantage is a characteristic of

areas that are at a distance from transport networks and where there are few public transport options. Inaccessibility to public transport means greater reliance on private vehicles, which has been described by Banister (1994) as ‘forced car ownership’. The concept of mobility and transport justice builds on the literature of transport disadvantaged, transport poverty and transport and social exclusion. This literature highlights the importance of transport for the economic and social well-being of individuals, households and communities (Currie, 2011). Nixon and Schwanen (2019) argue that we must recognise the complexity and contextual socio-political factors, to explain mobility practices. This researcher emphasises that mobility justice is “multi scaled” and sensitive to how people’s capacity and desire to move and interact with decision makers and decision-making process. Their emphasise is on socially and ecologically sustainable transport, such as public transport, to improve the mobility needs of less advantaged members of the community. The concept is helpful to understand issues related to public transport services and infrastructure for a particular community. Therefore, the principles of “mobility justice” is useful to identify the transport needs of a range of groups, especially the socially marginalised communities such as immigrants.

Wang and Lo (2007) and Lucas (2012) argue that immigrants’ cultural backgrounds can be an important determinant of their travel behaviour. Wang and Lo (2007) show that Chinese immigrants in Toronto prefer to shop at more distant ethnic stores than mainstream stores closer-by, even if the products that they seek are available at both. Such cultural behaviours influence spatial relationships and travel patterns in Toronto. A growing body of literature has indicated that ethnicity is an important determinant of public transport usage even in highly motorised Western countries. A study from Norway by Uteng (2009), for example, shows that public transport makes up 32 per cent of the daily trips undertaken by immigrants from non-Western backgrounds, compared to 8 per cent for the native Norwegians. Meanwhile, only 41 per cent of trips made by these immigrants are by car, compared to 66 per cent for the natives. In a US study, Blumenberg and Smart (2010), find that immigrants are 2.8 times more likely to commute by public transport than native-born Americans. A well-planned public transport system can meet the basic needs of immigrant communities and promote transport equity and justice.

This paper tries to understand the intersections between the immigrant population and their everyday mobility in Auckland. This paper contributes an ethnically diverse lens to discussions of public transport by discussing the experiences of a particular group of migrants – Indian sub-continent communities who were born in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, but now live in car-dependent Auckland. These communities provide important and novel perspectives in identifying public transport issues and solutions in Auckland, to complement previous work on Chinese and Middle Eastern population.

## 2 METHOD

Auckland is the largest city of NZ having 1.7 million population in 2017. Auckland is an ethnically diverse city. At the 2013 Census, almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Auckland residents identified with an Asian ethnicity, a much higher proportion than for New Zealand as a whole, at 12 per cent. The largest sub-group were those who identified as Chinese, followed by those who identified as Indian. As this paper has focused on the Indian-sub continent – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lank and Nepal, it is estimated over 125,000 people associate

with these communities. According to various reports, the number of people from Indian sub continents have been increased since 2013, but the result of the 2017 census is not available at the time of writing this paper.

For this research, two in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion was organised in Auckland. The interviews were conducted with current or the past presidents of Indian and Pakistani community organisations located in Auckland. These organisations are very large and have more than 10,000 members. It was believed that they represent their communities (as they are elected in a democratic process) and have in-depth knowledge of community aspirations and challenges about public transport in Auckland. Focus group discussion members generally comprised senior members of their communities and have lived in Auckland from the last 10 or more years. They have lived, worked and raised kids in Auckland and have substantial knowledge of transport issues for commuters, women and children going to school and universities. I asked them to talk about their experiences with transport and travelling in Auckland since they immigrated to New Zealand. Respondents were encouraged to tell stories about their past and present experience in Auckland, in comparison to their experiences in their country of origin or any other country they have lived or visited.

When asked about the main reasons for choosing to emigrate to New Zealand and settling in particular suburbs in Auckland, each of the interviewees spoke of prioritising their children's education.

*The reason was the schools were better in that area for the children, and also the social standards were different from other areas... the traditional people, old school New Zealanders lived in those areas, and their values and standards were better as compared to South Auckland which was miserable at the time (Interview 2)*

Alongside prioritising the need to be near top education providers, the interviewees also picked suburbs based on already established communities and friends living in the area. The need to maintain their social circles and cultural ties is very important.

*Some of our close friends were already there so we found sort of ease there (Interview 1)*

*More than social was the facilities, it was in central location (FG)*

*We wanted to live near the central location. Our children were school going age at that time. We wanted to enrol them into good institutions [schools]. This was our target. (FG).*

Although some of the interviewees picked their suburbs based on schools and for the community, some were unsure when they first arrived, and only settled in areas based on not wanting to live in certain other areas. In particular, the North Shore was deemed as an unfavourable location to reside.

*I did not know anything and we did not do the research, we just came here blindly and found a house in Mount Wellington and went there...*

*We did not know exactly what areas have benefit... In Epson houses were expensive, we had no idea about the North Shore. So that's why we did not take houses in those areas because they were very expensive. (FG).*

*We also saw that the university would be accessible to children. It would have been difficult from North Shore. (FG).*

Auckland is very spread out and public transport service quality varies. There is a possibility that the location of interviewees' residences and workplaces can influence the public transport experiences. However, I addressed the limitation of this method by asking additional questions about public transport services in different areas of Auckland. Moreover, there were no women included in interviews and focus group discussion, which is certainly a limitation of this research. However, one woman responded by request by sending an email about her experience of public transport in Auckland and it has been incorporated in this article.

### **3 RESULTS**

#### **3.1 PUBLIC TRANSPORT VS CARS BATTLE**

##### **A) STATUS OF THE CAR**

Many immigrants want to travel in cars as status symbols in their communities. Despite this, some of the participants of the interview did not believe that their cultures and those they associated with from their ethnic groups were concerned about car ownership as a sign of status.

One interviewee described how not owning a car did not affect your 'status', however once you owned a car, then the make and model of the vehicle became a 'status thing.'

*You see same people. Same immigrants go to London, they don't own a car. Same thinking. Same religion, same prestige, same something, why do not they own a car there. Because they get down from their house and they can get into public transport and the transport is so good they think what the hell will I do with this car. So it is not, but one you have to buy a car, then the status comes whether you can afford to buy a Mercedes or you have to keep Toyota. (Interview 1).*

*We do not even look down at khatarra [in very poor condition] car, or even someone has Mercedes then also we do not care (FG).*

*... car is for our own facility [ease]. If we have to go to shopping or to the doctor or to a picnic then we use the car. No one says that your car is good or bad, and we also don't have feelings about this. (FG)*

*My car is the cheapest car than all. This is the cheapest one (FG).*

However, one interviewee compared the difference in this view between two of his sons. One son bought a car around 2003, which he still uses. The respondent described the condition of this car as 'very bad' and 'old', however it still works as his son does all of the maintenance work on it. The respondents other son's first car was an Audi, so this varies from person to person and we cannot generalise for our community.

## **B) CONVENIENCE OF THE CAR AND BREAKING HABITS**

Focus group discussion stated the convenience and ease of the car develop their habits which is hard to break.

*FG: 'We generally go by cars. Their house from our place [has very little distance] that we can walk but still we use cars.'*

*Interviewer: 'Why don't you walk, cycle or take a bus'*

*FG: 'Only out of ease.'*

*FG: 'One of the reasons is also the weather. Sometimes it's windy, sometimes rainy. You come into walking mode but then have to change and its not good.'*

The respondent who did not allow his children to use public transport when the service was not good when they were school-age did agree that there had been improvements over the last few decades. However, even though the services have improved, people like his son still do not choose public transport as their mode of choice, because they are not in the habit of doing so. Similarly, the interviewees wife has never used public transport and continues to give preference to the private vehicle

*... my wife has never used a public transport. She has no idea what a public transport look like, you know. (Interview 2).*

Although first generation immigrants may not understand the systems, it is in their view that their children will adapt wider societal values and driving is one of the dominant kiwi values.

## **3.2 PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES**

The respondents talk about time, cost, poor linkages and frequency and safety issues, as challenges for public transport services in Auckland. The details are:

### **A) TIME**

A common issue that all respondents spoke of was time. Most interviewees also described how they found that taking public transport was far slower than driving their private vehicle.

*My younger son he is the regional director for... it is a very senior position... So he doesn't have time to waste on the bus and the train. He goes by car to his office. (Interview 2).*

Hina was born in Pakistan and moved to New Zealand nearly 10 years ago for higher studies. She grew up in a household and a city where public transport and walking were part of everyday life. However, when she started using public transport in Auckland she shared her feeling as:

*“I travelled to Albany campus [North of Auckland] from Epsom [inner South Auckland], and I changed three buses to get there which took more than 2 hours and when I finally was at Albany for the scheduled meeting, I forgot to elaborate the discussion points and even the importance of my meeting. I kept questioning, was it worth spending that time and money to attend the meeting? Then I went back from Albany to Papatoetoe and I changed two buses and a train. I felt crazy, and lost. I thought, is this possible for a transport researcher to tease out the daily life of city travellers. Would it make some difference if your children are going to school in the buses and you catching 2-3 buses to reach the office? I have decided not to use buses and trains frequently. To save time, I am 'becoming' okay to spend money and get Uber for short distances where I have to change 2-3 buses” (Hina Cheema’s email to author in 2016).*

There appears to be a view that those who had ‘higher regarded’ jobs, did not have time for public transport, as they had more of a choice when it came to picking their mode of transport. However, it depends on the location of the destination and route structure. Few people view that using the bus and public transport can be faster than travelling by private vehicle.

*... our children... living near the city as well. If they go in car more time is required [to reach to office]. (FG).*

## **B) FREQUENCY, AVAILABILITY AND COVERAGE**

Indian sub-continent communities complain about low frequency of buses in Auckland, which add the total time consumed for travelling.

*Busses used to come after every 45 minutes or 30 minutes. If you go on busses, you have to wait for the whole day. (Interview 2).*

While some respondents discussed the overcrowding of busses in the morning and during peak time, they also spoke of the limited availability of public transport during off-peak times. Of significance for the ethnic community was the congregating of large groups, usually in the evening time for ethnic events and celebrations such as Diwali. One respondent spoke of how these tend to finish late in the evening, and because public transport is limited, they only ever drive private vehicles to such events.

*If you are there and the show finishes 10 o’clock there’s no way we can reach home. There is like at that time, so time of the public transport, availability of that time is very important... (Interview 1)*

Few respondents discussed how the transport system and the way that public transport operates in Auckland, has progressed over the last 30-years. Previously it was ‘horrible’ but

not busses, trains are far more frequent, and there has been an improvement to both services and facilities. New routes have been introduced, and this has had positive impacts for ethnic communities. For example, Mount Roskill has had significant improvements to transport with new public transport routes being introduced and this is significant as approximately 90% of Pakistani and Indian immigrants live in Mount Roskill. However, public transport is still 'not enough' in Auckland as it only meets up to 20% of the requirement of the public, leaving an 80% gap. Moreover, train services served the very limited area in Auckland subject described as the train routes are 'equal to nothing.'

A strong idea that came across in all interviews was the theme of forced car ownership due to the lack of public transport. The respondents spoke of the necessity of having a license and owning a vehicle even before looking for a job and long-term employment. Mobility was, and remains a priority in Auckland.

*Car is a necessity. If you don't have a car otherwise you are not mobile. You would not be able to carry [shopping] bags from the distanced places [like shopping stores]. That's why people need the cars. Majority treat it as a necessity whatever the model it is. (FG).*

*My son got admission in Massey [Albany campus], Massey is very far... we have to buy him a car... It would be very difficult to go there [Albany campus] through bus. (FG).*

One respondent complained about the coverage of public transport network and suggested using feeder busses. Smaller busses should go more into internal routes, which would improve the coverage of the whole city.

*... I think public transport has to take more passengers than it is currently have. Buses have to serve various localities and passengers should not have to walk more than 50-100 metres to reach bus stop. (Interview 1).*

### **C) COST**

Those interviewed showed a strong preference for private vehicle use over public transport, with one of the main reasons being the cost of public transport. Although it was not explicitly stated that public transport in Auckland was too expensive, the cost to travel in a group was viewed as more economical than if a group was to travel by bus or train. A reduced cost to incentivise the use of public transport was alluded to as an aspiration for better services in Auckland.

*They [the children] are in the college but they go to Papakura.. it's about 15/20km from our home. So we have to drop them off. There's a bus also, school bus but that is costly as you know the transport here, if you are four or five people travelling it is cheaper to go by car. (Interview 1).*

*... you see if I look at my car, it does about 12km per litre, so it costs me \$2 or another 50cents for maintenance... Now if I'm coming and going*

*back home, \$3 it costs me every day by my car because I am just 6/7km away. Imagine if I come from my home to this place, firstly I have to walk 300m to the bus stand and then in rain it's a problem, time wise also... then I take the bus which will be close to about \$4/5 and then I walk again to my office. So my time has increased considerably in doing this. And my money has not done any better. (Interview 1).*

The greatest aspiration for public transport in Auckland was the need for cheaper fares. The cost and time both need to decrease

*We will see the cost. The public transport should be cheaper, and the time... If it is economical then more people will use it. (FG)*

*... the costs have to come down. Even if the public has to, like government has to support it, to make it lucrative for people and at the same time the prices of cars should go up. (Interview 1).*

#### **D) SAFETY**

Another concern raised by one interviewee was the safety concern for his children, and his fears if they were to use public transport. His primary concern was that his children would be exposed to drug and alcohol use on public transportation and could be negatively influenced. This was the primary reason that he or his wife drove their children to school every day.

*We never allowed our children to use the public transport... We were not sure due to drugs usage etc. [in Auckland city] that what would happen to them [our children]... In public transport there is every chances that if you mix and mingle with certain people you can lose your controls and you can get into drugs and night clubs and other things. (Interview 2).*

Although the subject did concede that public transport services are better today, he still holds this impression about services being unsafe and a place of inappropriate conduct.

From another viewpoint, some of the interviewees found that they preferred to use public transport rather than their own private vehicles when travelling to, or around, areas that they deemed 'unsafe'.

*Or sometimes if we have to go to the area where there is fear of theft, someone may break the car window etc. in South Auckland. There people say that only go by PT. (FG).*

### **3.3 PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE**

Interestingly, no one complained about public transport infrastructures such as bus stops and rail station and their facilities.

### 3.4 PUBLIC TRANSPORT DECISION MAKING – COMMUNITIES INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Each of the interviewees was asked about the extent to which they participate in community projects and decision-making through processes such as consultation. The degree to which ethnic communities and individuals participate in the creation of land and transportation policy in Auckland varied. Some of the interviewees believed that they took an active role and supported through consultation. Subject one described his individual and collective communities' contribution to submitting on various laws and bylaws in the Auckland area.

*Yeah we take active part, like many of our members are on that, they call it People's Forum or something where they seek input on anything, library we want to do this. Some people provide their feedback and we encourage our members that they should because if you don't say then nobody will hear you (Interview 1).*

Through discussion, the heavy-involvement of the Indian community was compared to other ethnic groups in the Auckland area, and the interviewee queried whether these groups participation would be as high as his communities.

*... Now because we come from a background of inherent democracy which a person from China unfortunately doesn't even know. A person from China never thinks that he can also have a say but that's why when they come here he has not that mental setup or if a person comes from say Somalia he has not, or Middle East, unfortunately those people have never, so I think because of this inherent democratic setup they would engage. (Interview 1).*

Although there is the opportunity to consult and participate in the decision-making process, an interviewee described how it can be very delayed and hard to understand, particularly for immigrants and those who struggle with the English language. Many immigrants simply do not know what is going on as they are primarily focused on settling own and they are just trying to fit in. He suggests that everyone should practice participation, even just at their homes and in their smaller communities and that a few people collect these voices together and share this with the planners and council. This targeted consultation would be more effective than sending out mail to homes.

*The council is of white people's concept and it was for white people as mostly they lived here. Now only the white people... have shifted... We have to look here that whether the person has able to read the council information letters or not. (FG).*

*Immigrants ... take time to settle down and try to understand things and they don't speak much about it because basically they don't understand what is going on. This is the matter of educating them. (Interview 2).*

In comparison, when asked by the interviewers if they had ever objected to any council activity or received letters inviting them to participate in consultation, the (Pakistani) focus interview group described their lack of consultation.

*Only to the extent of voting. (FG).*

*There are few people [Pakistanis] who are involved. (FG).*

*Overall you can say that they [Pakistanis] are not playing an active role. (FG).*

*... 62 different Muslim nationalities, [but] most of them don't know this and don't know that from the voice and feedback the council's policies are made. (FG).*

The respondents revealed how just sending letters for consultation, as the council has done so in the past, is not good enough. They viewed letters as formalities that were a waste of time and material. The interviewees wanted to see more meetings as through this exercise, more good ideas and solutions may come.

There are other nationalities that also don't know the importance of communicating with council and planners and submitting on plans and policies, nor do they know how to go about it.

*There should be some other and effective way to inform them, either through the phone, or council should approach communities and nominate a community liaison person who would tell the rest of the community to involve in these things. (FG).*

Perhaps, this lack of consultation and unwillingness to participate is due to a distrust of government officials, and a lack of understanding by both parties.

*The people who are sitting in the council... don't have any idea about the necessities of the ordinary people as he only uses big cars. They have no link with the ordinary people. (FG).*

Respondents used stories to compare their experiences in their country of origin with their experiences in Auckland, and their aspirations for public transport in Auckland. As well as their personal experiences, some looked to other international examples that New Zealand could use as a model.

*Le Kon Yu said raise the prices of cars to such an extent that people have no choice to travel in public transport. [But] he developed and provided the public transport first. Transport is available in Singapore, you don't have to walk much before you get [public] transport... The system is such that you don't suffer. If they do this system here [in NZ] then why should we use the cars. (FG).*

One respondent commented on the overall attitude of both immigrants and native New Zealanders' and their unwillingness to participate in such processes. Therefore, the response rate for any consultation process is very low, at least in Auckland.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present results provide insights into the Indian community's everyday mobility practices and opinions on both the positive and negative aspects of public transport in Auckland. This section discusses the three main themes: cars versus public transport, public transport services and communities involvement in decision making, identified in the analysis of the Indian sub continent qualitative data.

The research shows that the most significant public transport issue for the Indian sub continent community in Auckland is its "time" – time taking from their origin to destination due to low frequency, less availability and coverage of public transport. Claims of having to travel for up to an hour or two to reach their destination were relatively common. Most respondents believe they have "limited mobility" without a car in Auckland. Hina's quote can be explained in terms of the practicalities of managing everyday life, as competing demands on time (work, education, and family responsibilities). Hina's response also associated Uber with positive feelings and ideas of comfort, speed, freedom, convenience, reliability, and efficiency. In contrast, public transport emotions are grounded around fragmented, slow, inconvenient, uncomfortable, and time consuming factors. Thus, Auckland lives are built around (and in turn come to depend upon) private car use and discourage immigrants to use public transport.

Walker (2011) argues public transport must exist in both space and time, thus it must run not just where we need it but also when we need it. Unless it does both, it cannot fulfil its purposes. While further confirmation is required, the low level of satisfaction with frequency and timing appears to suggest that there is a strong demand for off-peak services and services to the wider metropolitan area. Adli et al (2019) work on justice in public transport show that Auckland is providing minimum public transport services in major parts of the metropolitan area. The low-income suburbs in the east, south and west have poor accessibility. In contrast, public transport services are better in the prime locations close to major employment areas and better for short journeys. Our interview data with Indian-sub continent communities, confirm Adli's work as most Indian sub-continent people live in eastern and southern parts of Auckland. Auckland Council's proposal to create a modern, efficient transport system, and Auckland Transport's new network will no doubt help improve the reliability and frequency of public transport. However, it is important that these new network understand the residential location of Indian sub continent comments and jobs to provide equitable and fare transport system in Auckland.

Respondents have identified the cost of using public transport and safety issues. Although, most Indian sub continent communities belong to middle-income families, new students and new migrants have relatively low socioeconomic status. Therefore, affordability has presented as an issue. These concerns support the literature, which argues that ethnic travel behaviour, and concerns are unique due to their socioeconomic profile. The recent announcement of the

Mayor of Auckland to make free public transport for children over the weekend may help to reduce these concerns. It is also important to note that the cost of public transport in Auckland is not limited to the travel behaviour of those on lower incomes but also in comparison to driving a car. Second-hand cars are relatively cheap in New Zealand and affordable to students and migrants.

Public transport in Indian sub-continent communities in Auckland is seen in both positive and negative ways. Individuals who have had poor experiences of public transport earlier hold 'negative perceptions' about public transport in general. On the other hand, car is associated with status and convenience. The relationship between migrants and the car ownership, usage and status consciousness is well established in Australian cities (Burnley and Fagan 1999), but there are fewer studies in NZ cities. Currie and Senbergs (2007) argue that immigrant live in suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne, which are poorly served by public transport and have resulted in "forced car ownership". Although forced car ownership came up from interviews with Indian sub-continent communities living in Auckland, the data shows they are living in suburbs which are better served by public transport and public transport patronage is almost double in suburbs where the proportion of immigrant population are higher.

Traditional transport planning approaches prioritise science or technical approaches for the provision of public transport. These fail to account for the diverse socio-cultural communities and their social values in selecting mode choice (Fitt 2015). Recent research explained that the distinct transport behaviours of diverse ethnic groups cannot be explained solely by socio-economic differences and spatial patterns and cultural factors are likely to play important factor in choosing different modes of transport (Douma 2004; Modarres 2013; Tal and Handy 2010; Klocker et al. 2015). For example, the cultural perceptions of the car as a pristine status symbol in Indian sub-continent communities has influenced travel behaviour in Auckland, as evident from data.

Some respondents show their involvement and engagement with the Council in transport priority setting, while others show lack of communication. Indian sub-continent communities were more involved in civic decision-making as compared to Chinese and Middle Eastern communities. Due to democracy in their countries, they have some knowledge on how to participate in public engagement in Auckland. Although multicultural cities provide challenges in planning for diverse cities as previously expressed by Pestieau & Wallace (2003), diverse cultures, as exhibited by the Indian communities provide opportunities for enrich policy making. This is because they introduce fresh perspectives and outlooks on current and future planning issues. This opportunity would help in improving transport justice in the city.

This article explores every day travel experiences, norms and habits that shape Indian sub-continent migrants' transport practices in Auckland. Drawing on the work of scholars who explore the ways in which mobilities shape emotions and emotions shape mobilities, we also focus on the interviewees' feelings towards public transport, cars vs public transport and involvement in transport decision making. The interview data shows concerns regarding improving travel time, frequency and reliability of public transport in Auckland. The research shows a number of participants are attached with car due to the convenience, status and hard to breaking habits. Although Indian communities are involved in generating debate in Auckland, informal consultation is also required to get insights from the communities. This

research provides important insights into how everyday transport choices both shape, and are shaped by ethnicity.

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## 2. CHINESE COMMUNITIES

### **Abstract**

*Transport research finds that the ethnicity is a critical factor in explaining travel behaviour. New Zealand cities have become increasingly ethnically diverse, and transport planning can therefore, benefit from drawing on the plurality of cultures and values that underpin the social fabric of ethnic communities. The growing Asian population in Auckland provides an opportunity to transform an automobile-dependent city into a public transport friendly city, as in most Asian countries people make extensive use of public transport. This research explores opportunities for improving Auckland's public transport by studying the everyday experience and aspirations of the city's Chinese community. This paper reports data collected from Chinese community social media to explore daily experience of public transport in Auckland. The research identifies communication, expectations and perception gaps between Chinese users of existing and future public transport systems, and institutional practices.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores opportunities for improving Auckland's public transport by studying the everyday experiences and aspirations of Auckland's Chinese community. Auckland is one of the world's most car-dependent cities, as car travel makes up nearly 80 per cent of total trips (Ministry of Transport, 2014). More than six decades of road-oriented development in the city has resulted in a sprawling urban form with an inefficient and underutilised public transport system (Imran and Matthews 2011). In 2012/13, only 3.7 per cent of trips in Auckland were made by public transport, while the estimated congestion cost amounted to \$1.25 billion per annum (Auckland Transport, 2013).

Contrasting with the persistence of Auckland's congested transport situation is the fast changing face of the city's population. Starting in the 1980s, a new pattern emerged as Asia became the primary source of immigrants (Bedford, Ho & Lidgard, 2000). Auckland has been traditionally known for its unique combination of European and Maori-Polynesian cultures, but Asian immigrants' influence has been gaining momentum as 20 per cent of Auckland residents are now of Asian descent (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The Asian influence in Auckland provides an opportunity for transformation from an automobile dependent city to a public transport friendly city, as in most Asian cities people make extensive use of public transport (Newmans and Kenworthy, 2000). These observations lead to the research question: *What are the everyday experiences and aspirations of Asian communities regarding public transport in Auckland?*

The next section reviews the literature on transport in multicultural cities, focussing on how the views of ethnic communities' have been incorporated in transport policies. The third section details the methods used to identify and analyse the opinions and concerns of the Chinese community about public transport in Auckland. The following section describes the demographics, spatial distribution, and travel patterns of the Chinese community in Auckland followed by the views of this community on the challenges and opportunities for public transport. Those aspects are discussed in the context of the literature, and implications are drawn for public transport planning and policy making in Auckland.

### 2. PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN MULTICULTURAL CITIES

Multicultural cities should recognise and reflect the existence of cultural and racial diversity in their public policies and projects (Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 2000a). Sandercock

(2005) argues that planning policies must reflect and accommodate a mosaic of values, practices and customs in order “[f]or a society to be functionally as well as formally multicultural” (p.309). She believes that planning policies can benefit from drawing on the plurality of cultures and values that underpin the social fabric of communities. Burby (2003) finds that by bringing together different stakeholders, pluralistic planning can facilitate the integration of scientific and lay knowledge and build social capital, which, in turn, leads to improved planning outcome. From a practical viewpoint, understanding immigrant communities is also important, as they have been shown to be an important force in reshaping the physical and socio-economic structure of cities (Pestieu & Wallace, 2003). This can be seen in the emergence of ethnic enclaves, shops and places of worship in many world cities, with implications for the provision of services and facilities, including transport infrastructure (ibid).

Transport planning also faces increasing challenges in recognising and providing services for the diverse travel needs of the communities it serves (Axhausen & Schonfelder, 2010). Wang and Lo (2007) and Lucas (2012) argue that a person’s cultural background can be an important determinant of their travel behaviour. Wang and Lo (2007) show that Chinese immigrants in Toronto prefer to shop at more distant ethnic stores than closer-by mainstream stores, even if the products that they seek are available at both. Such cultural behaviours influence spatial relationships and travel patterns in Toronto.

A growing body of literature has indicated that ethnicity is an important determinant of public transport usage even in highly motorised Western countries. A study from Norway by Uteng (2009), for example, shows that public transport makes up 32 per cent of the daily trips undertaken by immigrants from non-Western backgrounds, compared to 8 per cent for the native Norwegians. Meanwhile, only 41 per cent of trips made by these immigrants are by car, compared to 66 per cent for the natives. In a US study, Blumenberg and Smart (2010), find that immigrants are 2.8 times more likely to commute by public transport than native-born Americans. In a separate study, Blumenberg and Smart (2011) show that the immigrant population has a considerably lower car ownership rate (604 per 1000 persons) than the native-born (765 per 1,000 persons). In another example, from Australia, Klocker and Head (2013) observe that 74 per cent of foreign-born workers commute by car, which is markedly lower than the figure of 84 per cent for the native-born.

Many studies have however, noted that immigrants are often subject to the process of transportation assimilation, suggesting their preference for public transport may be time-bound (Blumenberg and Smart, 2010; Casas, Arce and Frye, 2004). In general, over a period of 15 to 20 years, immigrants’ travel behaviour tends to converge with that of the native-born population. Such an assimilation process has been documented by Heisz and Schellenberg (2004) in their study of immigrants’ use of public transport in Canada. The authors show that recent immigrants (arrived in less than 10 years) exhibit significantly higher propensity to use public transport than long-term immigrants (arrived more than 20 years ago), even when controlled for other variables such as age and income. In Montreal, for instance, recent immigrants are 1.91 times more likely to commute by public transport compared to the native-born population, whereas long-term immigrants are only 1.06 times more likely to do so (Heisz and Schellenberg, 2004).

Blumenberg's (2009) research on the travel behaviour of immigrants in the US has painted a more optimistic picture, which shows that - even as immigrants grow increasingly car-dependent over time - they persistently exhibit higher alternative transport usage. This view is supported by Chatman and Klein (2009), who demonstrate that 73 per cent of immigrants who had been in the US for over 21 years drive to work, compared to 79 per cent of the US-born population. Moreover, the importance of public transport to the immigrant population in Western countries appears to have increased, even in the face of transport assimilation (Handy et al., 2009). In particular, Lo, Shalaby and Alshalalfah (2011) stress that "newer cohorts of immigrants have higher rates of transit use than earlier cohorts" (p.474). In Myers' (1996) study of Southern California, the share of public transport riders who are recent immigrants rose substantially from 27 per cent in 1980 to 42 per cent in 1990. Heisz and Schellenberg (2004) suggest that such cohort effects are mainly a result of the changing composition of immigration source countries, as there has been an increasing inflow of immigrants from lower-income regions such as Asia and Africa. Notably, studies have suggested that Asian immigrants in Western societies tend to be less car-oriented compared to the native-born population (Bergmann & Sager, 2008; Shimazaki, Hokao & Mohamed, 1994).

Ethnicity also shapes gender dynamics which are inextricably linked to public transport use. For example, studies have found immigrant women are more likely to travel by public transport than immigrant men (Asumah & Johnston-Anumonwo, 2002). Apart from the obvious fact those ethnic women are less likely to hold a driver's license (Blumenberg, 2009), several underlying cultural factors may have also contributed to the gender gap in public transport use. For instance, women's traditional role of household duties in many ethnic cultures means that they make many domestic-related trips during the day while men are away at work (Uteng, 2009). Without access to cars, they have to rely on alternative modes. Bergman and Sager (2008) also observe that in some Muslim communities, women are discouraged from driving.

However, the lack of understanding of local language and culture presents both opportunities and challenges for transport planners in growing public transport usage. On the one hand, Chatman and Klein (2013) observe that it may contribute to the lower level of driving among immigrants, especially upon their arrival. In their focus group interviews, for example, one Indian participant mentioned that he was too afraid to drive in the US because he was used to right-hand driving, whereas the US is a left-hand driving country. On the other hand, however, Raje (2004) and Hine and Mitchell (2003) argue that language and cultural factors may equally discourage immigrants from using public transport. For instance, Blumenberg (2008) - in commenting on the exceptionally high car dependence found in the Southeast Asian community in California - notes that 68 per cent of the population lack English proficiency, which renders it difficult for them to "to navigate the transit system" (p.39).

Consequently, Chatman and Klein (2013) emphasise that achieving a critical mass of non-English speaking public transport users is important as it makes it easier for new immigrants to learn about the transit system. As an example, they argue that the growing number of Spanish-speaking transit riders in the US has reduced the language barrier to using public transport for the Hispanic community, contributing to their high level of transit

ridership compared to most other ethnic groups. Therefore, Burayidi (2003) suggest that transport planners need to develop ethnic sensitivity in formulating policies in their respective cities, to ultimately increase public transport patronage. Given the notably less car-oriented culture commonly observed in Asian immigrant communities in Western societies (Bergmann and Sager, 2008; Shimazaki, Hokao and Mohamed, 1994), the research on which this paper is based, investigates the potential for transformative change in the public transport habits of Asian communities, as a catalyst for positive change in Auckland's transport landscape.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the Chinese community's everyday experiences and aspirations for Auckland's public transport. The data includes Chinese communities living, or with experience of living in Auckland.

Social media has been used as the primary source of data for understanding the perspectives of the Chinese community regarding public transport. For many years social scientists have collected data produced as a by-product of organisational record-keeping (Golder & Macy, 2014) The rapid growth of social media as a communication channel in the past decade has created a new version of this old research strategy from a 'novel source of rich data' (Zafarani, Abbasi & Liu, 2014, p.6), which enables researchers to study human behaviour patterns. This data produces time-stamped 'digital footprints' (Golder & Macy, 2014: 131). In this research, the footprints of the Chinese were studied based on online comments collected from three sources:

- a) Skykiwi forum: Skykiwi is a New Zealand website targeting the country's Chinese-speaking population. The website receives 75,000 unique IP visits per day, and is the 56<sup>th</sup> most viewed website in New Zealand. Its forum is home to the largest online Chinese community in New Zealand with over 200,000 registered members, of whom 83 per cent live within the Auckland region;
- b) Skykiwi news section: In addition to the online forum, Skykiwi also runs a popular news portal covering the latest New Zealand news in Chinese. The news articles themselves were of little interest to this project as they were mostly translated from the mainstream English media. However, a group of active readers leave comments under the news articles; and
- c) Sina Weibo: This Chinese microblogging website is very popular with the Chinese communities worldwide, with over 50 million active daily users, including many living in New Zealand.

The relevant forum threads, news comments and microblog postings were identified by keyword searches. To ensure that the data had currency and was of a manageable volume, the research only included comments added between January 2010 and June 2014 inclusive.

Once the data gathering process was completed, thematic analysis was performed to identify "the recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes" (Eisner, 1998, p. 104). The comments were categorised, translated and then recorded in Excel spreadsheets for further analysis. Each comment was assigned a unique identifier for easy

reference in the report. Using statistical tools in Excel, a summary table was also created to show the relative significance of each theme in the discourse of the Chinese about public transport.

The use of social media allows researchers to access hard to reach and empirically underrepresented groups (Golder & Macy, 2014; Leng, 2013). However, researchers do need to be aware of limitations centring on the generalizability of findings, and validity concerns relating to anonymity and low accountability (Leng, 2013). Concerns regarding generalizability stem from perceptions that internet access and use may be centred on a younger demographic than the general population, and thus not representative, but these differences are diminishing over time (Leng, 2013), and according to Golder and Macy do not warrant the 'widely used distinction between the web and the real world' (2014 p. 143). Further, the high level of use of the selected social media sites by the Chinese population increases its representativeness. It is also argued that social media participants comment on threads close to their experience, thus reducing distortion and increasing validity. In addition, if participants have relative anonymity their comments may be more freely expressed, hence again increasing validity. However, Leng suggests that social media users who share a common identity, such as membership of an ethnic community, may feel pressured to be consistent with group norms and expectations, to some extent countering the positive impacts on validity gained from anonymity. Evidence of emotive or vitriolic responses to postings (Golder & Macy, 2014) may also indicate that discussions are not necessarily representative of 'real world' behaviours. The data analysed in this research came from the social media sources discussed above, and is not an attempt to provide comprehensive coverage of the views on transport held by the Chinese community in Auckland. The researchers are cognizant of the limitations of research using social media, but recognise that social media is becoming increasingly representative, and useful for collecting data concerning the viewpoints of hard to reach groups such as the Chinese community in Auckland. It is expected that the broad range of opinions of this community on the issue of public transport will be reflected in the data.

#### **4. THE CHINESE IN AUCKLAND – BACKGROUND**

Auckland has traditionally been known for its unique blend of European and Maori-Polynesian cultures, although since the 1980s, Asian immigration has been increasing (Bedford, Ho and Lidgard, 2000; King 2003). In particular, China has become the largest Asian ethnic group, making up over 8 per cent of the region's total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2013).

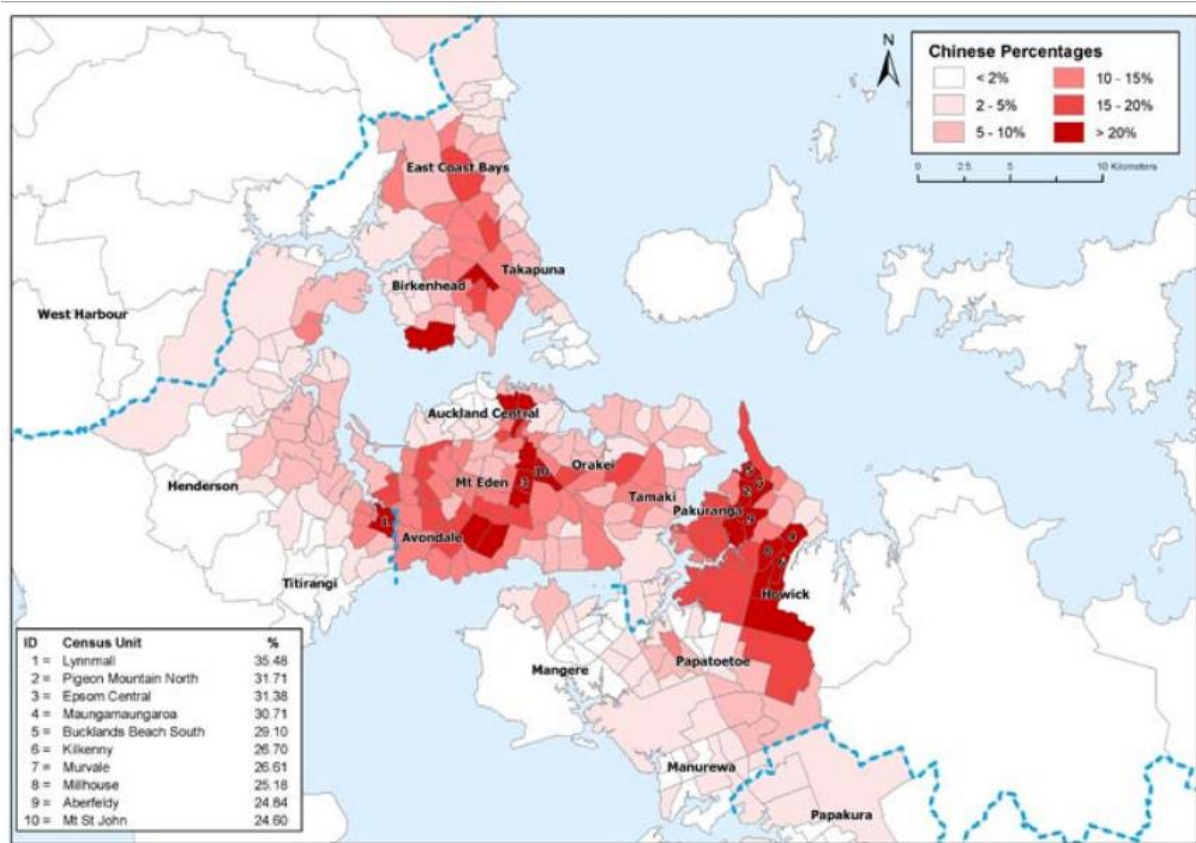


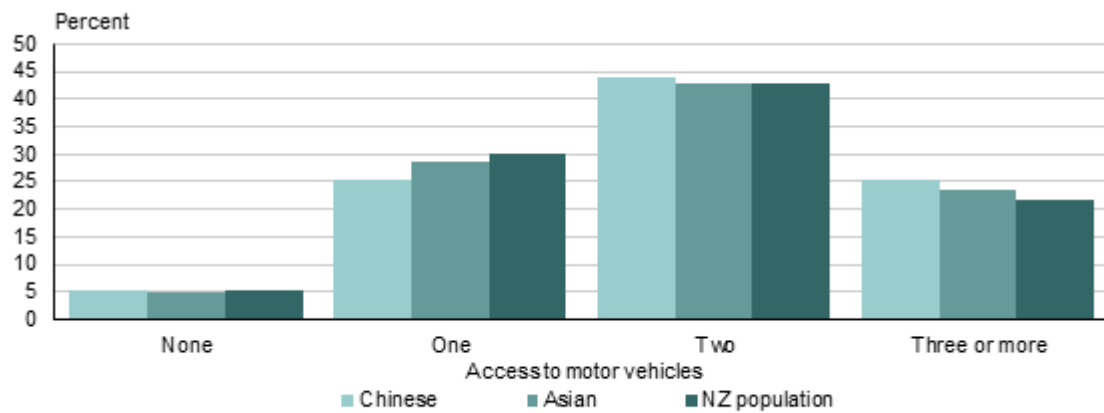
Figure 1. Chinese population distribution in Auckland (Meares, Ho, Peace & Spoonley, 2010).

According to the 2013 census, the Chinese population in New Zealand had reached 171,000 – a 16 per cent increase since 2006. Of these, 69 per cent, or 118,230 live in Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 2014a). The Chinese tend to have low socioeconomic status with a median income of \$16,000, which is significantly below the national median of \$28,500 (Statistics New Zealand, 2014c). Similarly, the Chinese also exhibit a low labour force participation rate. Only 52 per cent of Chinese over the age of 15 were employed in 2013, which was 10 per cent below the national average. One key reason for this may be that 28 per cent of working-age Chinese were engaged in either full-time or part-time study, compared to 15 per cent of the total New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand, 2014a).

The Chinese population in Auckland is predominately urban. While their presence can be detected throughout the region, their settlement pattern displays a trend of segregation. The areas with particularly high concentrations of Chinese include the CBD and Mt Eden in the city centre, Avondale in the west, Howick and Pakuranga in the east and Takapuna and Birkenhead in the north (see Figure 1). In many neighbourhoods in these areas, over 20 per cent of residents identify themselves as Chinese (Meares, Ho, Peace & Spoonley, 2010).

In terms of travel behaviour, the Chinese population exhibit high car ownership rates comparable to the national average (see Figure 2). In fact, the percentage of Chinese households with two or more private vehicles is even higher than that of the total national population. However, the Chinese are also more inclined to use public transport. As of 2013,

public transport accounted for 8.5 per cent of commuter trips by the Chinese, compared to 6.5 per cent for the total population of Auckland (Statistics New Zealand, 2014b).



Note: Some percentages may be too small to show on graph.

Figure 2. Access to motor vehicles (Statistics New Zealand, 2014a).

## 5. RESULTS

In total, 184 online comments were gathered for the purpose of social media analysis. The comments were divided into two main themes: public transport infrastructure, and public transport services. Public transport infrastructure received 48 comments, while the public transport services received the attention of 129 comments.

### a) Public transport infrastructure

Of the 48 comments posted on public transport infrastructure, the City Rail Link (CRL) and Waitemata Harbour Crossing (AWHC) proposals are the most frequently discussed infrastructural issues by the Chinese communities, making up 26% of all the social media comments collected. The CRL has been a fiercely debated issue, accounting for 19 per cent of the total comments across three themes. The majority (69 per cent) of the 48 infrastructure comments referring to the CRL were against the proposal.

The Chinese community has strong concerns about the economic and financial viability of the CRL:

...rail development has very limited effect on relieving congestion. Yet [the CRL] costs more than Aucklanders can afford (comment CR09).

Several reasons are presented for opposing the CRL. Firstly, many argue that Auckland’s built environment does not support rail development:

Auckland has low population density. Rail only benefits a minority of people where it goes. It is infeasible for the majority to use rail (comment CR09).

[The council should] replace the houses with high rises first. Then it can talk about rail (comment CR05).

A second commonly-cited reason for rejecting the CRL is lack of profitability:

With Auckland's small population, the question is how the CRL could possibly run profitably and generate a positive return on the investment (comment CR31).

The author of comment CR35 is also concerned that the “expensive second class unrealistic railway loop” will burden Auckland residents with a “huge debit”.

The third major concern regarding the CRL is its usefulness:

I can't fathom why there is need for underground rail when Britomart and Mt Eden are so close anyway (comment CR23).

Investment in the bus system and bus only lanes is superior than rail investment (comment CR280).

However, 31 per cent of comments referring to the CRL show support for the project. They generally consider the CRL an effective way to improve public transport:

Singapore and Hong Kong have much lower car ownership rates than New Zealand ... because the public transport system is so excellent... From this point of view, Len Brown's proposal (the CRL) is a step in the right direction (comment CR12).

In contrast to the CRL, the AWHC receives majority support with 77 per cent of the relevant comments in favour of the project. The Chinese community particularly favour the tunnel option for the AWHC, which would provide a rail connection between the CBD and the North Shore:

I support the development of public transport such as underground rail and light rail. I do not support the road-only tunnel or bridge proposals, as they cannot resolve the [congestion] problem (comment HCo8).

Comments against the harbour crossing are mainly concerned with the cost of the project, which as commentator HCo1 worried, will be “passed on to Auckland residents”.

## **b) Public transport services**

The 129 comments made about public transport services have been further subdivided into issues of i) affordability, ii) reliability, frequency, and operating hours, and iii) customer service.

### ***i) Affordability:***

The most common theme in the Chinese community's comments on public transport in Auckland is its affordability, making up 29% of the total comments. Of these, the overwhelming majority (78 per cent) consider the fares to be excessive, and a major deterrent to public transport use. Of these 45 comments, 78 per cent, (n35) consider the ticket prices too high. For example, one comment from 2013 questioned:

I couldn't believe that it cost \$5 to travel [from New Lynn] to the central city by bus each way... How are poor people like me supposed to survive?

Another in commenting on a bus ticket price increase in 2013 argued:

When public transport becomes too expensive, then it doesn't deserve to be called 'public' transport.

There is a common perception that public transport is of poor value compared to driving. 18 per cent of the comments under this category were of the view that public transport costs at least as much as driving, which is a major disincentive to travelling by public transport. Several users even detail calculations to support their frustration against the perceived high costs of public transport. For example, in recounting his/her one-time experience of using public transport in 2013, one person stated:

I took a bus from New Lynn to the city. [I] bought a 3-stage return ticket costing \$9, or \$4.5 each way. In comparison, I used to drive into the city. My car costs \$55 to run 350km, so a return trip into the city is only about \$4 worth of petrol. That leaves me \$5 for parking. It costs only 2\$/hr to park on either Nelson Street or Hopson Street [I can't remember which one]. Therefore I can park my car there for 2.5 hours, which is long enough for the purpose of my trip (comment AF21).

One user argues an alternative viewpoint, that Auckland's public transport providers could justifiably charge higher ticket prices because it is generally much less crowded on buses and trains in Auckland (compared to Chinese cities) (Comment AF31).

The online comments suggest that the Chinese community's negative perception of public transport affordability in Auckland is influenced by their socioeconomic status. Comment AF27, for example, explains:

I am jobless at the moment. It is likely that I will be on the minimum wage if even I do get a job later on, which means that I may earn roughly \$400/week after tax... I need to purchase a 2-stage ticket from where I live [, if I get a job in] the CBD, which costs \$3.6 per trip or \$7.2 return. Lunch costs at least \$5 ... Rent costs over \$100 each week. Even if I budget carefully, food and other living expenses still are around \$200 per week. If I can't find a full-time job, and work only part-time, I doubt that I can survive on my wage even without the public transport costs.

Despite the negative perception about public transport affordability by the majority, a statistically significant minority (18 per cent) of online comments are neutral or supportive of public transport pricing policy in Auckland. For those who consider public transport to be fairly priced, most cite the lower relative cost of public transport compared to driving as the primary rationale:

Bus is cheaper than driving if you take into account the costs of owning, maintaining, insuring and parking your car (comment AF14).

A monthly bus pass costs \$120. [In comparison] parking [in the CBD] usually costs \$4/hr, and full day parking at least \$10 (comment AF25).

Apart from the higher costs associated with driving, other concerns such as sustainable development, comfort of travel and the rising operational costs of bus companies also appear in the online comments in support of public transport pricing.

### ***ii) Reliability, frequency, and operating hours***

Reliability is the second most discussed theme among the Chinese community, making up 22 per cent of the comments collected. The overwhelming majority (90 per cent) of comments under this theme describe the public transport services in Auckland as unreliable. Firstly, many Chinese cite lack of punctuality as the leading issue that undermines the reliability of public transport, including claims that:

In recent months, my bus has never arrived on time (comment RL12).

I often have to wait for 30 to 40 minutes [to commute to work, because] there is only one car in my household and my wife is driving it (comment RL22).

It is noteworthy that most of the negative comments concerning reliability relate to bus services, while views on the reliability of trains are more divided. Some consider trains more reliable than buses because “they do not get stuck in traffic jam” (comment RL25). Others argued that trains are often late too, and sometimes run into mechanical problems.

Overall, the comments suggest that reliability issues render public transport an unattractive option for the majority of Chinese in Auckland, increasing the journey time, which imposes a substantial opportunity cost on public transport users:

...there is an opportunity cost for time spent on waiting for the bus... today it took me an hour to get into the city by bus, compared to just 45 minutes by car. In conclusion, I will never travel to the city by bus again (comment AF21).

People will take a bus if it is fast enough. If a bus trip takes 30 minutes whereas driving takes 50, would you rather travel by bus or car? I would

definitely choose bus. It also saves the hassle of parking. I have been driving in Auckland for 7 years and have hardly ever used public transport. But I will always prefer public transport as long as it is faster than driving (comment JTo4).

Secondly, the issue of poor punctuality is compounded by the low frequency and short operating hours of public transport. Many bus routes have hourly frequency during off-peak hours, which is a major drawback for the Chinese community. Comments include: states that

The unpunctuality, low frequency and early finishing times of certain [bus] routes upset me more [than the high costs](comment RLo7)

We get only hourly bus service [in the North Shore] and so often [the bus] never even shows up (comment RL13).

Nevertheless, a number of online comments also express satisfaction with public transport frequency during peak hours:

The bus service in the North Shore is ok. During morning and evening peak hours, there is a bus every 5-10 minutes (comment RL23).

Additionally, the ticketing system is also seen to undermine the reliability of public transport:

The Hop Card technology is too immature...There are often issues (with the ticketing system)... For that reason I have been prevented from boarding the bus for several times (comment RLo3).

### ***iii) Customer Services***

The social media data shows strong evidence that poor customer service and information deficiency has limited the Chinese community's access to public transport in Auckland. An overwhelming number of online comments describe the unfriendly and rude behaviour of bus drivers:

I say 'Hi' to the bus driver every time when I board the bus, but they often do not respond (comment CS17).

Once I only had a \$20 note when I got on the bus, so the driver asked me to go to the dairy shop nearby to get change. But once I got off the bus, he shut the door and drove away. I felt cheated (comment CS05).

At times, poor customer services may even escalate into safety concerns. Several online comments mention accidents caused by bus drivers' misconduct. According to comment CS14, the author was "thrown out of the bus" because the driver suddenly took off while she was still queuing by the door to purchase a ticket. Comment CS16 also talks about

how a female passenger with a toddler in her trolley fell over as she got off because the driver did not put down the wheelchair ramp.

A large number of the postings found on the SkyKiwi forum were inquiring about public transport schedules and routes. One important reason underlying such information deficiency is system complexity. For example, between 2011 and 2012, Auckland Transport updated the bus cards twice, with the HOP card replacing the previous Go Rider card in 2011, and the AT HOP card replacing the original HOP card in 2012. This caused considerable confusion among Chinese public transport users. Secondly, some posts also clearly suggest language barriers to be an issue for the Chinese community in using public transport. For example, one comment asked:

I'm new to Auckland and need to catch a bus. My English is not good. Can anyone please tell me after I get my bus card, whether I only swipe it when I board the bus, or do I need to swipe it again when I get off (comment IN01).

## **6. DISCUSSION – Explaining the Chinese everyday experiences and aspirations on Auckland public transport**

The section discusses the two main themes, public transport infrastructure and public transport services, identified in the analysis of the Chinese community social media comments. The analysis presents valuable insights into the Chinese community's opinions on both the positive and negative aspects of public transport in Auckland. Given evidence that immigrant communities often make greater use of public transport than native-born populations, insights such as these present can guidance to policy makers, on how to better tailor services to meet the needs of immigrant communities, with the intention of increasing their ridership.

### **a) Public transport infrastructure**

Auckland Council proposed public transport projects such as the CRL and AWHC have sparked fierce debate among members of the Chinese community who use social media. In terms of the CRL, the majority of the comments about this project are negative. The key concerns are related to the project's high construction cost and its limited utility. By contrast, the AWHC proposal has received strong support from this community, with many emphasising the need for the crossing to effectively incorporate public transport.

Logan et al. (2002), and Tal and Handy (2010) argue that residential location may have a role to play in explaining opinions, such as those of the Chinese community on the two projects. Although there is a large Chinese community living in or near the CBD (see Fig. 1), Auckland's Chinese population is also found in many suburbs. As many of these suburbs – particularly those on the North Shore, Pakuranga and Howick - do not have access to rail, the benefit of the CRL is likely to be heavily discounted by residents from these areas. The additional harbour crossing by increasing the connectivity between the North Shore and the rest of the city, is more positively received as it benefits a wider population. Perhaps Chinese community's views represent the poor communication between the Council process and the local communities. CRL and AWHC projects are certainly evaluated in Auckland Transport's

prioritisation process. The CRL doubles the capacity of the entire rail network which benefits a huge area of Auckland, impacting both the southern and northwestern motorway corridors.

It should be noted that many Chinese who are against the CRL are not fundamentally opposed to rail development per se. Rather, they consider it a poor fit with the low density characteristics of Auckland's existing urban landscape, which limits accessibility to rail for the wider population and thus the profitability of train services. From this perspective, the Council's strategy of promoting intensification may, overtime, increase the acceptability of the CRL to the Chinese community. This is because by actively advocating for medium- to high-density housing and infill development, particularly along major transport corridors, a land-use transport integration is likely to increase public transport patronage.

### **b) Public transport services**

The research shows that the most significant public transport issue for the Chinese community in Auckland is its affordability (See Fig. 3). One reason for this may be related to the Chinese population's relatively low socioeconomic status, often as students and/or new immigrants, making them less likely to be able to afford public transport. The Chinese community's relatively low economic status and their strong affordability concerns tend to support the literature which argues that ethnic travel behaviour may differ from that of mainstream society, due to their unique socioeconomic profile.

It is also important to note that the impact of the perceived high fares on public transport in Auckland is not limited to the travel behaviour of those on lower incomes. The data shows that many people describe public transport as "expensive" (rather than "unaffordable"), which makes it an unattractive alternative to driving. Although there is no consensus as to whether public transport is cheaper than driving in terms of monetary costs, what emerges from the data is a prevailing view that high bus and train fares, in conjunction with poor reliability, increases the opportunity cost of time, rendering public transport as poor *value* compared to driving. This has led many to claim that they would rather spend more to drive their own car for its convenience.

The Auckland Plan (2012) describes affordable living, including transport, as a guiding principle in the Council's efforts to attain their desired outcome of a well-connected and accessible Auckland. However, in giving effect to this principle, the council sees public transport as a means to reduce the cost of living, it usually being considered alongside the Council's affordable housing policies. In other words, by framing public transport as a positive, cost-saving modal choice within the broader context of rising house prices and costs of living, the council has avoided having to address the issue raised by the Chinese regarding perceived high costs of public transport.

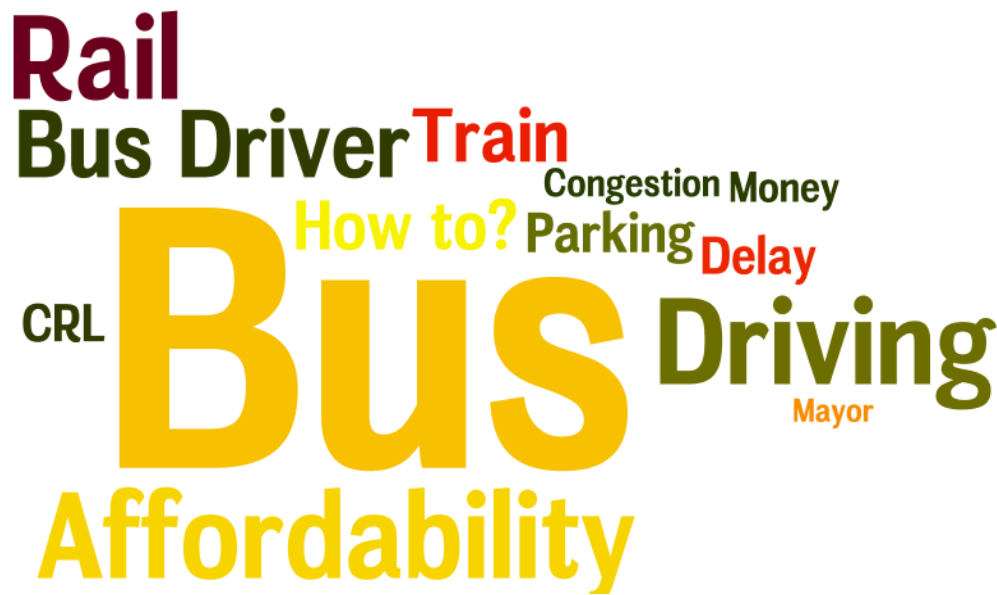


Figure 3. High frequency words used by the Chinese communities about public transport.  
 Note: The frequency of each keyword positively correlates to its font size.

Reliability, low frequency and operating hours of public transport services are all major shortcomings of Auckland’s public transport for the Chinese. The research shows that while a few Chinese public transport users have commented favourably on the peak hour services, many others consider the frequency of services unsatisfactory, especially during off-peak hours and at weekends. Claims of having to wait for up to an hour for a bus were relatively common. While further confirmation is required, the low level of satisfaction with frequency appears to suggest that there is a strong demand for off-peak services (which tend to be less frequent compared to peak-hour services) in the Chinese community. Such demand is not unexpected considering the Chinese population has a low labour force participation rate with only 35 per cent working full-time, which suggests that they may be less likely to have a car and to travel during peak hours. This possible link between the socioeconomic makeup of the Chinese population and their travel demands for off-peak services is also supported by previous international studies by Lovejoy and Handy (2008) and Smart (2010). Auckland Council’s proposal to create a modern, efficient transport system, and Auckland Transport’s new network will no doubt help improve the reliability and frequency of public transport.

Customer service is another area of public transport that the Chinese regard as needing improvement. The research results suggest that some Chinese bus users find Auckland bus drivers to be unfriendly and/or impatient. A few have even raised safety concerns about the drivers’ work practices. While customer service related issues appear to be of less significance than other matters such as affordability and reliability, they could still reduce the incentive for the Chinese to use public transport. The limited English proficiency of many Chinese immigrants further restricts their access to information and undermines their experience of the complex and potentially confusing public transport network in Auckland. Incidences in which people miss bus stops or catch the wrong bus appear to be common among the Chinese in Auckland, especially new immigrants. These findings coincide with the views of Raje (2004) and Hine and Mitchell (2003) that cultural shock and language barriers may reduce the accessibility of public transport to ethnic communities. The finding of

this paper also consistent with Syam's (2014) research that there is a significant difference between travel needs, attitude and perceptions of transport modes among different ethnic communities in Auckland. Asians travel noticeably less than people of other ethnicities (Europeans, Maori and Pacific Islanders) both in terms of number of trips and distance travelled. Failure to acknowledge the transport needs of these communities is likely to lead to inadequate infrastructure and service provision, creating barriers for people to fully participate in society.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper is to explore everyday experience of, and aspiration to use, public transport by Chinese community in Auckland. The research is motivated by the concept of multicultural cities, which posits that ethnic communities have the potential to facilitate institutional change towards effective and innovative policies. This is particularly important for transport policies, and public transport would benefit from engaging with a greater diversity of communities. This research focuses on Auckland's public transport policy because the city has suffered from chronic car reliance, which has prompted Auckland Council to promise a transformational shift towards a more public transport oriented future.

Auckland's Chinese community was selected as the subject of this study because of the strong growth in the Chinese population over the past two decades. The data shows that the Chinese community would like to see improvements in existing public transport services rather than focus on the mega projects advanced by the Council. Although Auckland Council has been campaigning heavily for CRL, there appears to be a generally negative attitude towards the project among the Chinese community as many consider the project to impose high costs yet yield limited benefits.

The service quality of Auckland's public transport is regarded as unsatisfactory by the Chinese. Particularly, affordability, reliability and low frequency have been key factors deterring use of public transport, issues which can be fixed in the short term, ultimately improving patronage (Imran and Matthews, 2014). Other issues include poor customer service, a complex and confusing network and language barriers. Auckland Transport confronts some of these issues in their new network design, which addresses issues of public transport efficiency, reliability and connectivity. However, customer service and language barriers have so far been largely neglected. Perhaps more bilingual staff and drivers might help improve this situation.

This paper has identified communities' preferences for improvements of public transport in Auckland. As Sandercock (2000a, 2000b & 2005) suggests, multicultural planning can potentially improve policy making by bringing fresh ideas and additional perspectives. The study of Chinese perspectives on Auckland's public transport has uncovered many issues, including affordability and language barriers, which Auckland Transport should consider. The Auckland Plan has placed a strong emphasis on social inclusion as part of its public transport policy. However, its strategy for this relies predominantly on improving the physical access of communities to public transport, and ignores the socioeconomic factors that restrict people's access to public transport. With public transport affordability left

unaddressed, the mobility of low-income Chinese families is likely to continue to be limited, preventing them from fully participating in New Zealand society.

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### 3. MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITIES

#### **Abstract**

*The multicultural city of Auckland is creating immense challenges and opportunities for transport planning. International examples show that culture, as a defining factor in the travel behaviours of immigrants in multicultural cities, needs to be explored. The impact of changing societal dynamics in Auckland due to immigration necessitates enhanced understanding of the transport needs and aspirations of new communities. The aim of this research is to explore Middle Eastern needs and aspirations for Auckland's public transport. Storytelling through participant interviews and a focus group are chosen as the main technique to gather and analyse data about this immigrant group's experiences of public transport in Auckland. The key findings reveal the distinctive needs and aspirations of the Middle Eastern community. Four main needs are identified; convenience, reliability and certainty, directness, and awareness of changing perceptions of public transport. Further, two main community aspirations emerge; rail-based public transport and proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes. The findings show there are opportunities to change negative pre-conceived community perceptions of public transport through positive experiences of efficient and effective rail-based public transport services in Auckland.*

#### **1. INTRODUCTION – EVERY DAY TRAVEL EXPERIENCES IN MULTICULTURAL CITIES**

Multicultural cities face many challenges but also provide many opportunities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main challenge is how to make cities inclusive and sustainable by accommodating diverse cultural needs and aspirations in urban policies (Burayidi, 2003; Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 2000). Sandercock (2000) advocates planning systems, which instead of treating communities as homogeneous, show sensitivity to class, gender, ethnicity and culture to achieve fairness and effectiveness in policies. Historically, formal legislative planning systems in the western world have given little attention to cultural difference, as it was assumed they would become assimilated into the dominant culture (Burayidi, 2000). As a consequence, ethnic minorities often lack engagement with urban planning and policies (Qadeer, 1997). Integration of multiple cultural values is challenging and complex within the formal planning system, and requires the provision of sensitive planning processes and representation in statutory plans (Qadeer 1997).

Increasingly, the literature is documenting the influence of transport mode perceptions and cultural norms on the travel behaviour of individuals (Beirao & Cabral, 2007). For example, cultural perceptions of the car as a pristine status symbol have influenced travel behaviour in many countries (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Similarly, car and public transport usage is embedded in the dominant social and cultural values of many cities such as Los Angeles (car) and London (public transport) (Bean, Kearns, & Collins, 2007). However, transport planning's traditional focus on the relative service quality of particular modes is often a determining factor in mode choice (Eboli & Mazzulla, 2007). Preston and Raje (2007) find that the quality of public transport services, and accessibility and convenience factors influence the utilisations of public transport for journeys to work. Thus, the efficiency of services, travel time, and cost of using transport services are important factors in choosing a transport mode (Jakob, Craig, & Fisher, 2006).

There is agreement that the presence of immigrants in contemporary cities has significantly increased the demand for transportation across all travel modes (Blumenberg,

2009). However, travel behaviours of immigrant communities are believed to differ from those of native-born communities due to cultural perception (Blumenberg, 2009; Blumenberg & Smart, 2009). In the US Blumenberg (2009) and Tal and Handy (2010) argue that immigrants are more likely to utilise public transport on a regular basis than native-born residents. Blumenberg and Smart (2009) state immigrants are three times more likely to use public transport and twice as likely to share travel journeys in Southern California than the native-born. Reasons for these contrasting travel behaviours include socio-economic and accessibility factors, largely evident for immigrants in the early stages of migration (Blumenberg, 2009).

In recent years, many cities have adopted collaborative and participatory decision-making which provides opportunities for migrant communities to influence planning policies and the direction they take (Healy, 1997, Holden & Scerri, 2012). For example, Vancouver proactively engages immigrant communities in developing urban policies and in achieving a unique vision (Uyesugi & Shipley, 2007). Vancouver has proven that ethnically-sensitive planning policies have the potential to transform cities that embrace cultural diversity and promote sustainability (Uyesugi & Shipley, 2007). Culturally sensitive policies are particularly important in transport planning as Vancouver has achieved high per capita usage of public transport due to the presence of immigrants, intensification of land use, and the network effect of public transport design (Spinney, Scott, & Newbold, 2009). Transport planning in Vancouver incorporates the travel patterns of ethnic cultures to achieve sustainable transport policies (Sandercock, 2000). This approach is the opposite of traditional transport planning which claims neutrality, and dismisses the specific cultural needs of immigrant communities (Pestieau & Wallace, 2003).

Vancouver is a suitable comparator to a city like Auckland, as both cities not only share similar topography, urban density and the strength of their CBD but also aspire to becoming one of the most liveable cities around the world (Imran & Pearce, 2015). Various ethnic groups residing in Auckland have had a significant impact on the cultural fabric of the region. In 2013 Auckland Council conducted research on the attitudes of Auckland residents to multiculturalism (Auckland Council, 2013). The results reveal the majority of the 1,957 individuals surveyed from various ethnicities who answered each question were positive and accepting of immigrants. According to Census 2013, more than 40% of Auckland's residents were born overseas, while 20% of the city's population comprising Asian and ME communities (Auckland Council, 2013). The Middle Eastern (ME) population originate from southwest Asia, where the Asian, African and European continents converge. In the census, the ME communities are counted in the MELAA (ME, Latin American and African) category amounting to approximately 25,000 individuals in total. Among MELAA, over 50 percent of the population are considered ME. This figure has grown sharply, with a 15% population increase between 2006 and 2013, due to immigration for study and work purposes, as well as refugee arrivals, initially from Lebanon, then Iraq, and now Syria (Auckland Council, 2014c). The ME population of Auckland is rather young, the majority of people being aged between 20 and 34 years, (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The ME community predominantly reside on the North Shore, and in the Eastern suburbs and Papatoetoe (Auckland Council, 2012). Howick, in particular exhibits significant cultural diversity within the local board area, with approximately 50% of the people residing in the area classified as immigrants, mostly from the ME countries (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). The growing ethnic diversity of Auckland

presents an opportunity to transform an automobile-dependent city into one with a thriving public transport system serving the needs and aspirations of immigrant communities.

Traditional transport planning processes pay little attention to ethnic diversity due to a privileging of technocratic views over community needs and aspirations (Burayidi, 2003). Studying the everyday experiences of immigrant communities provides opportunities for planners to extract valuable information and data from individuals and communities as a catalyst to transforming transport policies (Sandercock, 2003, Hine & Mitchell, 2001). The mobilities paradigm focuses on the subjective factors which shape people's everyday experiences of community (Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010). It is very hard to measure or quantify subjective factors but they are crucial in understanding individual (im)mobilities. Studying everyday mobility experiences provides a valuable conceptual framework, to answer the research question *how can exploring the everyday experiences of Middle Eastern immigrant communities improve public transport planning and policies in Auckland?*

This research has two objectives, 1) to explore the everyday transport experiences of ME immigrant communities to understand their needs, and 2) to understand ME communities' aspirations for public transport. This qualitative analysis identifies ME communities' perceptions, biases and experiences, leading to their varied and variable use of public transport in Auckland. We are interested in unpacking their value structures and feelings about what they regard as desirable public transport solutions. This will help in reducing the gap between ME communities' aspirations for public transport and the proposed projects of Auckland Council.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This research uses 'storytelling' as a methodology for the Auckland case study investigation. Storytelling provides a platform to explore communities' views and perceptions on a particular policy and project (Sandercock, 2003). Sandercock (2003) argues storytelling helps to understand immigrant values, customs and concerns, ultimately educating professionals and politicians, and potentially becoming a catalyst in setting new policy directions. Narrating stories is beneficial for communities themselves who require local representation at a professional level (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003). Thus storytelling both provides the ability for planners to understand viewpoints and opinions of people who are generally invisible during planning processes, and gives voice to immigrant communities. Storytelling has in the past failed to provide the desired outcomes due to power struggles between different organisations (Flyvbjerg, 1998). However narrating stories and the way stories are communicated generates rich qualitative human-centred information for researchers (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003). If narrated stories are supplemented with analytical thinking and data, they can ignite new perspectives on transport planning (Denning, 2001).

The purpose of this research is to explore the public transport needs and aspirations of ME immigrants in Auckland. Two individual's stories were gathered, and a four participant focus group discussion was conducted with ME immigrants to gain insight into their personal experiences of public transport in Auckland. The individuals were strategically selected as representatives of a community association, varying in age, occupation, life stage, gender and

country of origin. The selected participants are either Auckland residents or members of the wider ME community who have extensive experience and knowledge of ME community issues and aspirations. Some participants have lived in a number of Auckland suburbs which is useful in revealing a wide range of experiences of public transport services across Auckland. Table 1 provides demographic details of the participants involved in the interviews and focus group.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Period of living in Auckland</b>
Ibrahim	34	Engineer	13 years
Ahmad	45	An executive of ME Association	1 years
Leena	30	Mother with one child	5 years
Imaan	27	Mother with two small children	4 years
Rania	21	University student	1 year
Omar	44	Scientist	22 years

**Table 1: Demographic details of participants**

The focus group discussion explored the diverse concerns, aspirations, positive experiences and needs of the ME community regarding public transport. The interviews were conducted in Arabic (the most widely spoken language in the Middle East) to allow participants to easily explain their stories. The primary ethical concern for the interviewing process was cultural sensitivity, however, considering one researcher is of a ME background this ethical concern was easily managed in a culturally-acceptable manner. These stories were recorded, transcribed and then translated. Research questions aimed to allow participants to freely and openly express their opinions on Auckland’s public transport. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality. The interviewed participants were asked general questions about their origin, when they migrated to New Zealand and their everyday experiences of using public transport services in Auckland.

### **3. MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITY STORIES OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN AUCKLAND**

This section documents stories expressed by members of Auckland ME communities regarding their needs and aspirations towards public transport.

#### **A) IBRAHIM’S STORY – MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORT RELIABLE**

Ibrahim migrated from Kuwait to New Zealand in 1994 and migrated to Auckland some years later at the age of 28. He has spent recent years attaining a tertiary education at the Albany campus of Massey University. As a student, Ibrahim caught buses daily and has wide experiences of public transport services across Auckland. He completed his Bachelor of Engineering in 2008 then went on to post graduate study from 2008 - 2011. During his student years, Ibrahim experienced inefficient bus services. He stated *‘it is a whole regional issue but I think in the North Shore it’s the worst for getting efficient public transport.’*

Ibrahim believes the North Shore experience the worst bus services due to infrequent services and population dispersal, creating excessive demand on public transport services compared to other areas of Auckland. According to Ibrahim the North Shore bus services are

the least reliable due to their inability to cater to the high-frequencies required to transport passengers. He is concerned about the efficiency and convenience of bus services on the North Shore apart from the Northern Busway which is *'fantastic'*. Regarding owning a private vehicle he believes *'you don't have a choice. It's not a luxury, it's a need.'* This statement in itself reflects the views of many Auckland residents who simply feel they have limited alternative transport choices other than to use a car, which continues to create concerns environmentally, economically and socially. It is clear from Ibrahim's facial expression and tone of voice that he believes public transport networks and services need extensive review, change and development. Auckland new public transport network project might help to address Ibrahim's concerns.

Ibrahim explains how he had lived in a number of suburbs in Auckland after migrating from Kuwait partly moving due to the problems he faced with accessibility, and the regularity of bus services. As a university student, accessing a regular bus services was a determining factor in choosing residential location. He found peak-time public transport services to be the least reliable; the mornings when people travel to work and university, and the evenings when people return home. He explains the changing dynamics of Auckland with regard to traffic congestion: *'ages ago traffic jams were only between 8am and 10am and between 5:30pm and 7pm. Now it's between 6:30am and 7pm – almost the whole day, which creates problems for students who want to attend classes at mid-day';*

When asked if certain circumstances affect one's willingness to use public transport, Ibrahim answered *'yes, if I had a meeting in town I would never catch or depend on the bus to get to the meeting to be on time, it's not reliable at all. For a meeting I would rather withstand the hassle of finding parking then withstand the hassle of not reaching the meeting on time.'* Ibrahim expresses strong opinions on the need for reliable bus services and further reveals the need to develop effective and trustworthy services which will encourage increased public transport patronage.

Due to Ibrahim's international experience of reliable public transport, he carries positive perceptions and a willingness to use public transport. He aspires to an alternative rail-based public transport service as the dominant public transport mode for Auckland. He believes rail-based public transport will reduce road congestion, and supports an electric rail network for Auckland *'I used the underground trains in London which are so so convenient. You literally can travel to any place so that would be amazing if Auckland had something like this.'* This signifies the correlation between positive public transport experiences and one's willingness to use public transport when in new environments.

Ibrahim shows concern over his ability to access information and participate in local matters. He wants the ME community to become more engaged in decision-making processes *'I wish there was something to participate in and for the Council to be more active because currently, based on what they are planning I don't know how they collected their information or data. As a resident we have no access to the information, maybe it is online but I don't know if it's available or not'*. This is an important concern for Ibrahim as he wants to see ME community engagement in planning processes.

## **B) AHMAD'S STORY – OVERCOMING NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Ahmad is an executive member of an ME association, and moved to New Zealand in 2003. Initially, he lived in Auckland but then moved around the country to follow his job. However, in his executive member role he remains well-connected to his community. Ahmad thinks '*negative perceptions*' of public transport are the greatest disincentive for the ME community to use buses. Ahmad believes these negative perceptions have developed due to poor experiences of public transport either internationally or in Auckland, creating reluctance in ME communities to use public transport. He notes the ME communities who moved from London, Paris, Singapore and Hong Kong where good quality public transport services are available, have less negative perceptions of public transport '*I definitely think that some people having exposure to internationally successful public transport networks has altered their personal perceptions*'.

To Ahmad, positive or negative perceptions of public transport, formed prior to migration to new environments are a dominant factor in higher or lower public transport usage by ME communities. Considering ME countries are often considered 'third world countries' the cultural perceptions when migrating to New Zealand are to improve quality of life, seen to be facilitated by cars. According to Ahmad the biggest challenge to encouraging ME immigrants to use public transport is '*they have to change their perception about....you see ahhh it's how to change the mentality. It's not that easy, it's not that easy. Because everyone comes to a country like New Zealand expecting to improve their living standards so if they had their own vehicle in the Middle East it would be a major step backwards if they decided to rely on public transport.*' This statement reveals the perception Ahmad and others like him have of public transport due to their inexperience and lack of exposure to good quality public transport networks.

ME immigrants coming to New Zealand, find using public transport difficult especially if they are coming directly from their home country where there is no good quality public transport. Overcoming negative perceptions is essential to increase public transport patronage; Ahmad explains '*psychologically you have that barrier that [by using public transport] I'm going backwards instead of going forward. So this psychological barrier in my opinion is the first one to overcome with Arabs before you persuade them to use public transport*'. Overcoming these challenges can be achieved through positive primary public transport experiences.

Significant concerns over the convenience of public transport in Auckland are also expressed by Ahmad '*I found that bus services were rather unreliable and inconvenient, nothing really beats the convenience element of commuting with your own car ... I just can't count on buses to get me to where I need to go, especially if I have an appointment or I need to be somewhere for work*'. Ahmad's statements illustrate the cultural perceptions immigrants hold when migrating to New Zealand.

### C) FOCUS GROUP NARRATIVES AND DISCUSSION

The stories from the four participant focus group are described below.

**Leena – friendly but unreliable public transport:** A participant in her early thirties with young children voiced positive personal experiences; *'bus services are very friendly in Auckland'* due to the support shown by bus drivers and passengers, especially when managing a pram and children on the bus. She also highlights bus reliability issues when commuting from one location to another *'I feel that Auckland bus services lack reliability. When wanting to travel somewhere important and on time I always use my car, it's not worth the risk of catching a bus and arriving late'*. A perception of unreliability supports the need to introduce a reliable alternative public transport mode.

**Imaan – make it direct:** A participant in her late twenties expressed her willingness to travel using public transport, if direct services are provided in Auckland; *'I've taken buses to visit friends and it was about a 1 hour 45 minute ride. Honestly speaking, it is too much time from point A to B with young children and the unpredictable weather of Auckland. And I'm just mentioning about time, not the cost involved for this journey. As a parent I believe we all try to choose realistic options'*. Imaan's concerns over travel time and the directness of public transport are derived from her need as a mother to conveniently transport herself and her family around Auckland.

**Rania – bring in more 'kool' trains:** A participant in her early twenties explains her concerns with the uncertainty of bus services *'with buses you get stuck because of traffic, it's not consistent and the timing is not ideal. People need certainty.'* The appropriateness and potential inconveniences of public transport on roads was a central concern for Rania, leading to preference for rail-based public transport services. *'I like trains because they provide a more relaxed and kool travel environment compared to a bus. And because it's a train, the possibility of having an accident compared to a bus is really minimal. For instance if there is an accident on the road such as a car crash, it could directly have an impact on buses and the timing of their services ... I loved trains when I was overseas...you don't get stuck with traffic, with a bus you're on a public road but with a train it's more consistent and reliable time-wise.'* Thus Rania indicates concerns with the timing of public transport services, which is a major concern for public transport users.

**Omar – make public transport convenient and attractive:** Omar is in his mid-forties and migrated to New Zealand with his wife and two children from Jordan in 1993. Omar frequently used bus services in Jordan when travelling to and from university. He explains as a student in Jordan, using ineffective and unreliable public transport *'wasn't a choice, by any means it wasn't a choice because at that time in my life I was a student and there were limited options for me to travel to university because cars were so expensive in Jordan.'* He further explained *'Back home in Jordan transport infrastructure isn't designed for anything but driving. You can't even actively walk around because footpaths aren't typically provided'*. Convenience is a critical factor for Omar in using his car rather than public transport. *'I choose to use my own car for convenience purposes although I haven't had much experience with public transport in Auckland'*. Concerns regarding the benefits derived from public transport were raised by Omar *'Buses in Auckland aren't attractive. I mean what can*

*a bus provide me that a car can't?*' Omar felt his needs for travel are not currently effectively met by public transport, creating a reluctance to use public transport.

#### **4. DISCUSSING STORY NARRATIVES**

Analysis of the collected stories is organised into two main sections; a) ME community experiences and needs and, b) aspirations. Four main themes have been derived from the community's needs for public transport; convenience, reliability and certainty, directness, and awareness of changing perceptions toward public transport. Two main themes have been identified from the community's aspirations; rail-based public transport and proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes.

##### **A) PUBLIC TRANSPORT EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITY**

One of the most predominant needs for the ME community is an effective and efficient public transport service in Auckland. These need can be achieved through improving convenience, increasing reliability and certainty, improving travel times and directness, and creating awareness of the changing perceptions of the ME community.

**i) Improving convenience:** The stories reveal concerns and aspirations for a convenient public transport network which meets need. A general need is expressed for greater availability and efficiency of Auckland's public transport services. However ME communities are concentrated in areas which generally suffer poor public transport coverage. This creates difficulties for community members travelling from one location to another (Preston & Rajee, 2007). Reflecting these key themes, Heggie (1978) argues travel behaviours are substantially determined by convenience and accessibility of travel modes. Wider availability of public transport services at off-peak times is a key aspiration for female members of ME communities who want to travel for leisure purposes or for carrying out responsibilities such as picking-up their children from school. Stone, Mees, & Imran (2012) argue greater availability of off-peak public transport provides opportunities to young, ageing and female populations to travel, making transport and cities more inclusive (Sandercock, 2000). Consequently, it is important to widen the Auckland regional public transport network rather than a sole focus on building mega public transport projects in the CBD.

**ii) Improving reliability and certainty:** Reliability and certainty of public transport services are also major aspirations revealed by different stories. Reliability is linked to timing, accuracy of arrival times and capacity to provide service to passengers (Noland, 1997; Paulley et al., 2006). Despite the concerns expressed by participants, they all aspired to an organised and consistent public transport system, to provide confidence that services can cater to their needs, in terms of timing, quality of service, and availability or reliability. Infrequent services were revealed as a critical factor discouraging participant use of public transport. Unreliable public transport led to individuals choosing private transport (Jakob et al., 2006; Stone et al., 2012). Stories from Rania and Ahmad show willingness to use public transport if services can provide certainty of departure and arrival times. Leena found bus services friendly but preferred to travel by car for appointments rather than risk arriving late

due to a lack of bus service reliability and certainty. Ahmad also expressed his lack of confidence in the current public transport network which has discouraged him from using its services. His lack of trust derives from a lack of reliable public transport services. Each of these examples shows a clear need for change in the operational services to maximise public transport patronage. Public transport services which fail to cater to user needs will continue to restrict opportunities to increase public transport patronage (Preston & Raje, 2007), while greater reliability and shorter travel times encourage public transport use and influence travel behaviours and attitudes (Beirao & Cabral, 2007).

**iii) Improving travel time and directness compared to cars:** Lack of direct public transport routes and long travel times are a major concern of the ME community in Auckland. For instance Ibrahim changed his residential location based on his need for greater access to public transport services, revealing the level of significance public transport can have for users. Frequency, efficiency and reliability are all important aspects of directness in public transport services, deficiencies in these being a major deterrent for ME patrons. A disproportionately long bus journey as compared to car journeys, along with insufficient bus routes ultimately deters participants from using public transport. Cars are seen to be a quicker travel mode because of direct routes, despite the levels of congestion experienced in Auckland (Beirao & Cabral, 2007). Until Auckland public transport exhibits shorter travel times compared to cars, ME communities will have reservations about using public transport. This is shown in Imaan's need for shorter journeys and direct bus service. Directness of services can be achieved by implementing public transport network planning principles (Imran and Matthews 2015) to improve the efficiency of public transport services. While reliability, connectivity and directness are confirmed as being important to non-immigrant populations in Auckland, there is no certainty, due to deep-rooted historical issues and attitudes to public transport, that these potential patrons can be a predictable market for public transport. However, newly arrived immigrant communities can provide a confirmed market for public transport given their higher propensity to use public transport than long-term resident immigrants (Imran, Yin & Pearce.2014, Klocker & Head, 2013).

**iv) Awareness of changing negative perception among the ME communities:** Public transport is seen by ME communities to have positives and negatives. Most individuals who have had poor experiences of public transport earlier in their lives (whether internationally or locally) hold 'negative perceptions' about public transport in general. In addition, over time ineffective public transport in Auckland has further increased negative community perceptions. Although perception may be seen as an initial barrier to public transport use (Hensher, 1994; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) ME communities are changing their perceptions of public transport through positive experiences. A number of participants state clear distinctions between ME immigrants who have been exposed to effective public transport services worldwide. Ahmad and Ibrahim acknowledge the change in attitudes held by those who have experienced effective public transport in cities such as London, Paris, Singapore and Hong Kong. Positive experiences of public transport can alter negative perceptions held by individuals. Leena conveys her positive experiences with bus services, expressing her appreciation for the cleanliness, seating, lighting, and accessibility of low floors. Positive experiences of service quality and the friendliness of bus drivers support positive attitudes towards public transport, these findings being consistent with Blumenberg

& Smart's (2009) research in Southern California. If immigrants first experiences of public transport are positive, an opportunity arises to increase public transport patronage in Auckland. Positive primary experiences may be accomplished through organising events which advertise public transport as an attractive mode, creating excitement and celebrating improvements in public transport services such as the new rail network. Providing complimentary Auckland Transport HOP cards to new immigrants and students could be an effective mechanism for increasing patronage, if those first experiences are positive.

## **B) PUBLIC TRANSPORT ASPIRATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITY**

Stories from the ME communities show two main aspirations related to public transport. One aspiration is for a rail-based public transport network to limit the inconveniences of road travel and to improve journey qualities and reliability of services. The second aspiration is for proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes.

**i) a rail-based public transport network:** attractiveness is an integral component in successfully increasing public transport patronage. when asking ahmad about the greatest challenge for the me community in using public transport the answer was simple; changing perception. ahmad believes negative perceptions and experiences of public transport, whether experienced internationally or locally are dominant factors and barriers in increasing public transport patronage. ibrahim believes rail-based public transport networks in auckland are a vital investment in changing the negative perceptions of me communities. participants showed significant support for train network electrification. the me community aspires to an effective rail-based public transport system, unlike the chinese communities which aspire to effective bus-oriented public transport (imran, yin, & pearce, 2014). like paulley et al. (2006) and fujii, garling, & kitamura (2001), the me community believe a rail network has the ability to provide quick trips compared to cars and buses which have to cope with the congested roads. rania thinks trains can provide increased journey quality and reliability. investing in rail-based public transport networks which cater to the needs of users is crucial if public transport patronage is to flourish (hensher, 1994; hine & scott, 2000).

**ii) proactive engagement in auckland decision making processes:** ibrahim shows his concern over the lack of effective communication between council and me communities regarding policy-making and priority setting. me communities were not involved in civic decision-making in their countries of origin and have limited knowledge on how to participate in public engagement in auckland. this creates a reluctance to participate in local matters due to a lack of understanding of the decision making processes. although multicultural cities provide challenges in planning for diverse cities (pestieau & wallace, 2003), diverse cultures, as exhibited by the me communities provide opportunities for enhanced policy making, as they introduce fresh perspectives and outlooks on current and future planning issues. enabling community participation in local matters is important in creating inclusive cities (qadeer, 1997; sandercock, 2000).

There appears to be a lack of communication between Auckland Transport and ethnic communities regarding priority setting for public transport. Despite official information being available online, community members feel they do not know where to access information, or how to influence the decision-making processes, and raise their concerns. This signifies a lack

of understanding and awareness around opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Gathering narratives of communities such as ME communities is essential in creating more inclusive transport planning systems where experiences, needs and aspirations can be explored (Burayidi, 2003; Sandercock, 2003). Exploring experiences of public transport by ME immigrants provides a window on the aspirations held for greater public engagement and opportunities for public involvement, which currently lack expression at social or political scales.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this research is to explore ME community needs and aspirations for public transport in Auckland. The stories of ME community reveal key concerns regarding improving convenience, reliability and certainty, improving travel times and the directness of public transport services in Auckland. The research shows a number of participants have negative perceptions of public transport due to their negative past experiences, whether in their countries of origin or in Auckland. However, community members are willing to utilise public transport if Auckland develops a good quality rail-based public transport system as seen in cities such as London, Hong Kong and Singapore. The research shows there is a need to understand cultural perceptions of public transport among different communities, and to exploit the willingness of recent immigrants to use public transport, with the ME community represents a young and growing demographic in Auckland. The research highlights the importance of innovative ideas and planning tools to cater to the needs and aspirations of diverse ethnic communities. Although transport planning is a major focus for Auckland, multicultural transport planning should be further developed to cater to the increasingly diverse communities created through mass immigration, as successfully shown by Vancouver. Formal consultation fails to protect and project immigrant needs and aspirations in the planning realm. Thus, only when effective policies and practises are created and efficiently implemented, will New Zealand thrive in creating innovative and coherent multicultural transport planning policies.

Transport policies will greatly benefit from incorporating the distinct needs of immigrant communities in Auckland. Auckland's population is rapidly changing and there is a need to approach transport planning from innovative angles and perspectives. The research reveals members of the ME community have pre-conceived perceptions of public transport and require positive experiences in order to encourage increased patronage. Positive public transport experiences can only be achieved through public transport networks which meet needs and aspirations, which can in turn only be achieved through development of effective policies. Positive attitudes were expressed towards a rail-based public transport network rather than buses. Therefore by gathering data on the ME community regarding their needs and aspirations for the future of Auckland, public transport planning and policies can become more inclusive, and foster inclusive and varied mechanisms of communication, further improving the efficacy and implementation of public transport policies. More inclusive and innovative approaches to public transport planning are required if a change in attitudes towards Auckland's public transport is to be achieved. Thus, by exploring the needs and aspirations of individual communities, a greater understanding of what planning tools and transport policies will be appropriate for public transport in Auckland can be achieved. Future

research should study and seek to understanding the correlation between positive public transport experiences and changes in perception. This is integral in understanding the cultural aspects involved in immigrant travel behaviours, which can then be utilised to help increase public transport patronage.

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