



Auckland Congestion Report 2021

GUIDING LIFE'S JOURNEYS FOR OVER 110 YEARS.

New Zealand Automobile Association



Issue Four: May 2022 | **Change of tack needed**

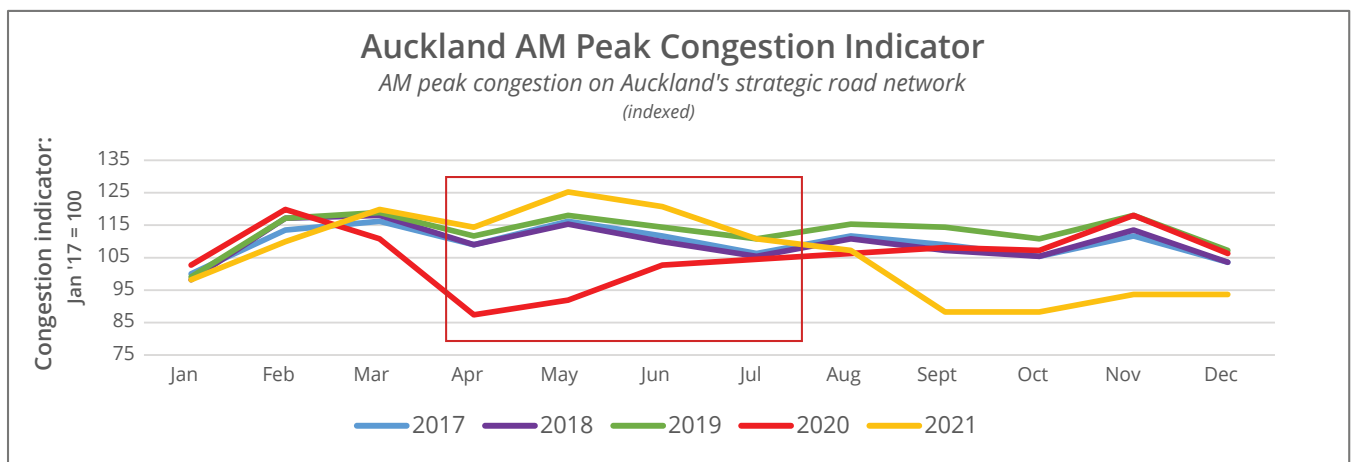
The AA Auckland Congestion Report is an annual review of congestion trends in Auckland, based on Google travel-time data.

2021 Key points:

- Most months in 2021 were impacted by Covid-related restrictions; unsurprisingly there was lower-than-normal levels of congestion during these months.
- Meanwhile, months free from restrictions (Apr – Jul) saw significant growth in congestion compared with 2018 and 2019 (i.e. before Covid hit). This comes despite Auckland's population declining (albeit slightly) for the first time ever.
- While Auckland's total population declined, much of 'outer Auckland' (areas outside the isthmus and lower North Shore) continued to grow – areas which typically have longer commutes and higher private vehicle mode share.
- A refreshed approach to managing Auckland's transport network is sorely needed. This needs to better provide for ongoing growth in private vehicle travel, particularly in outer areas, alongside investment in quality public transport (PT) and walking and cycling infrastructure.

Congestion worsens in months without lockdowns

- Covid-related restrictions were a part of life in most months in 2021 – and unsurprisingly, travel times dropped during these periods.
- But if we look to months that weren't affected by restrictions – in particular April, May, June and July – Auckland's congestion continued its year-on-year growth.

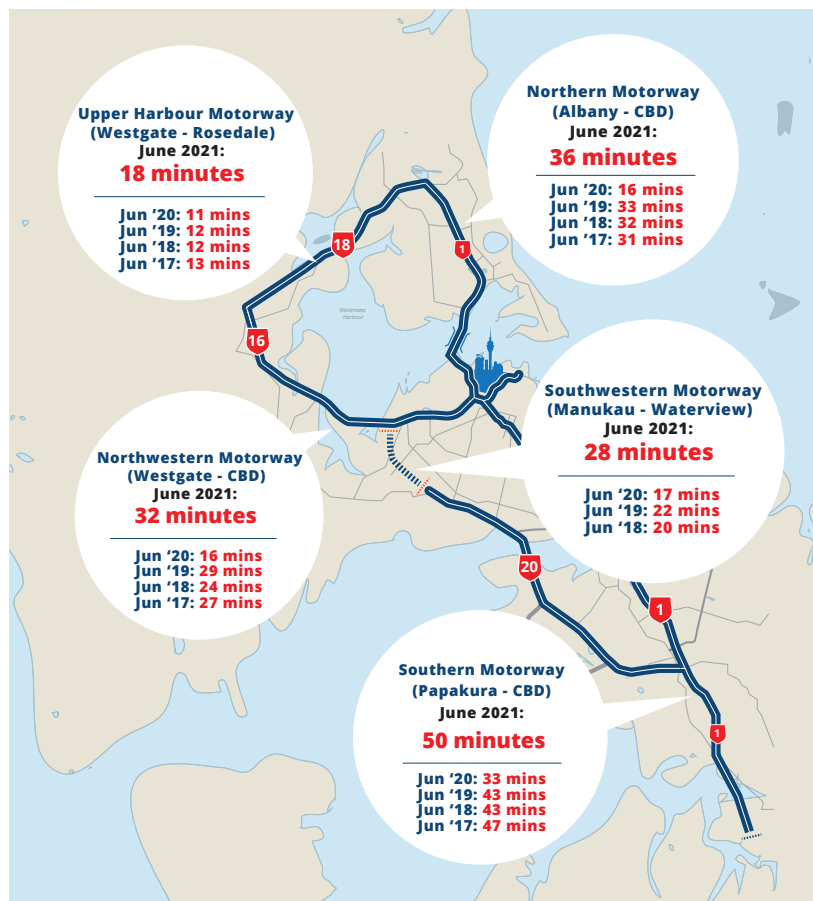


Covid restrictions in Auckland 2021	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
# days at Level 2,3,4 or traffic light 'red'	0	9	12	0	0	0	0	14	30	31	30	30

Comparing travel times in June 2021 with the previous four years illustrates how congestion growth is felt on the ground.

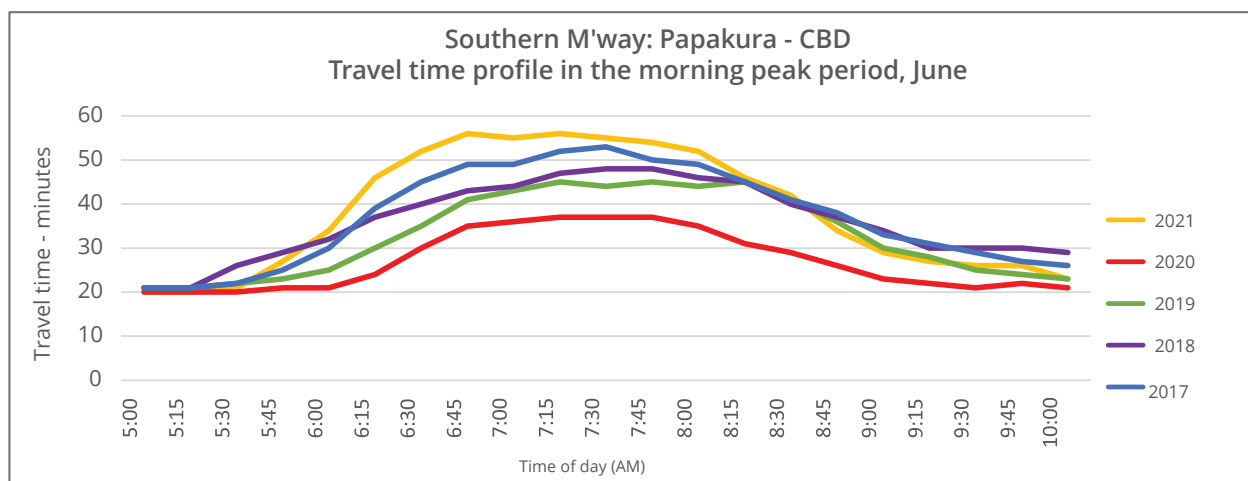
- Morning peak travel times continued to increase on all motorways.
- Morning peak travel times on the Southern Motorway are now higher than they were prior to the opening of the Waterview Tunnel in July 2017 (which provided a motorway alternative to the Southern Motorway through Auckland's isthmus).

Typical morning peak travel times on the motorway network in June



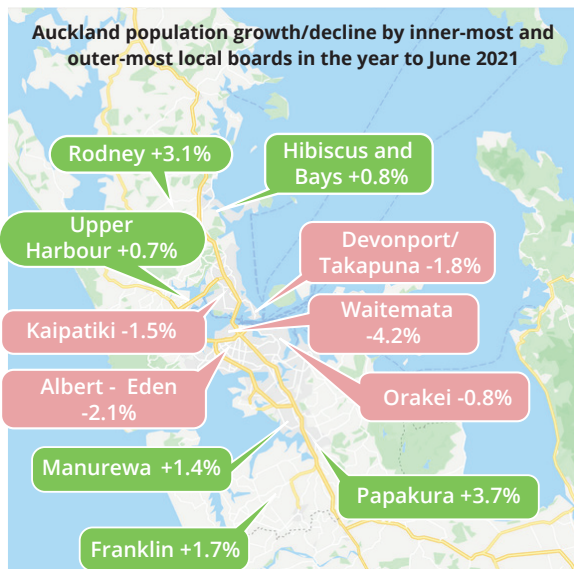
The increase in 'typical' morning peak travel times is being fuelled not only by an increase in the 'peak of the peak' (i.e. the longest time it takes to travel the route during the peak period), but also the 'width of the peak' (i.e. the length of time the route is operating in congested conditions).

We're increasingly seeing peak periods start earlier, peak higher, and finish later.

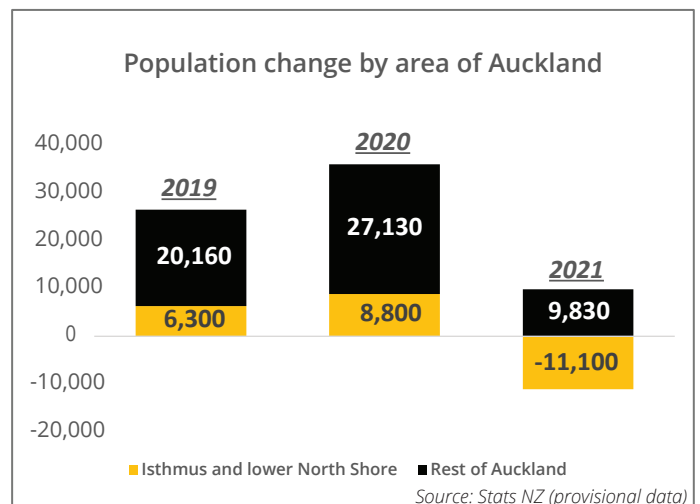


Population growth in outer areas fuelling growth in congestion

- Growth in congestion in 2021 seems at odds with Auckland’s population change; in the year to June 2021 Auckland’s population decreased, albeit marginally for the first time ever (as New Zealand’s border was closed to almost everyone to limit the spread of Covid-19).
- But scratching beneath the surface uncovers a story about differences in population change across the region. Centrally-located areas experienced the most significant population decline; while outer areas typically experienced population growth. Meanwhile in recent years, including 2021, **around 70% of new houses have been built outside of the isthmus and lower North Shore.**
- Auckland’s most recent Census data shows that typically, the further people live from Auckland’s city centre, the greater the likelihood that they travel to work by car and the longer their commute¹. This suggests the growth in Auckland’s outer areas is likely a key driver of the increases in congestion being seen on the network.
- Lower-than-normal PT patronage is also likely placing additional pressure on the road network, though it’s not clear how many would-be peak period PT trips are being taken by private vehicle versus those that aren’t being taken at all (e.g. working from home).



Source: Stats NZ (provisional data)



Source: Stats NZ (provisional data)

In 2021, 24% of dwellings consented were within 1,500m of a stop/station on the rapid transit network

Source: RIMU, Auckland Council

Commuter* mode share in selected local boards (pre Covid)

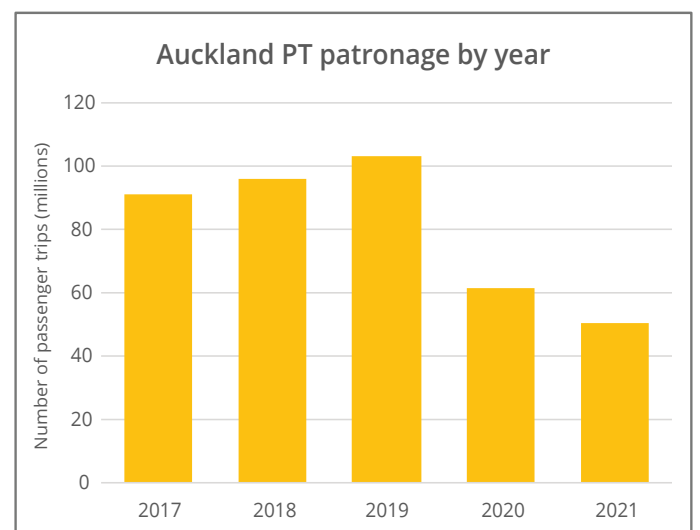
		Private vehicle	PT**	Active
Inner	Waitemata	36%	20%	44%
	Albert-Eden	59%	23%	18%
	Devonport-Takapuna	60%	23%	16%
Outer	Rodney	83%	12%	5%
	Papakura	80%	11%	9%
	Franklin	83%	10%	8%

Source: Stats NZ

* Journey to work and education based on latest available (Census 2018) data

** Includes school bus

¹Richard Paling, Analysis of the 2018 Census Results, October 2020



Source: Auckland Transport

The AA's perspective

- 1. Current approach to managing congestion not cutting it** For some years, Auckland Transport's (AT) focus for the transport network has been to grow the number of trips taken by PT, on foot or by bike. While this has been successful, it hasn't stopped growth in private vehicle travel, nor congestion. AT forecasts growth in vehicle kilometres travelled to continue in line with population growth over the next decade. If Auckland's population growth continues to be skewed toward outer areas (and we see no reason to believe it won't in the near term), it may be even higher.
- 2. All modes to the pump** High quality PT and walking and cycling infrastructure are integral in the development of Auckland's transport system and will play an increasingly important role as Auckland grows. However, it is equally clear that keeping Auckland moving will require significant investment across all modes of travel, including roads. Australian cities we like to compare ourselves against are heavily investing in PT but are also continuing to invest in roads. Even London, which has both one of the most developed PT networks in the world and congestion charging, hasn't stopped building roads². Auckland needs to do the same.
- 3. Travel times must be front and centre** Whether it's the commute, delivering freight, making that important business meeting on time, or even the trip to the shops or the beach, travel time matters. It plays a huge role in the economic success of the city and the wellbeing of Aucklanders. In conventional transport decision making, travel time savings, safety benefits, and more recently emissions, are weighed against a project's costs to help decide whether it stacks up for investment. While travel time still features in Auckland's transport investment decisions, it now plays second fiddle to a number of well-meaning but impossible to quantify objectives. Consideration of travel times needs to return to the front and centre of transport decision making.
- 4. Wide lens needed for new harbour crossing work** With planning underway for Auckland's next Harbour Crossing, it is critical to take on board lessons from previous work. A narrow focus on the need for enhanced PT to the city centre won't cut it. Nor will a road crossing that simply feeds traffic into the already clogged-up motorways (around half of trips over the Bridge are not bound for the city centre). The Crossing work provides a huge strategic opportunity to take a fresh look at Auckland's motorway network to identify what role it will need to play to support ongoing population growth, alongside other modes. While expansion of the motorway network is challenging, that's not a reason to put it in the 'too hard' basket.
- 5. What price should we pay?** The government is expected to give the green light to congestion charging, with legislation to follow. To meaningfully shift the dial on congestion, charging would need to – quite literally – price large numbers of Aucklanders off the roads. That will be fine for people who have viable alternatives or are able to delay their trips to times when the congestion charge does not apply, but without these options there will be people who really struggle to afford to make journeys that may be critical for their work or family.

²Transport for London is building a new tunnel under the Thames to reduce chronic congestion through the existing Blackwall Tunnel and allow for better public transport links