



Auckland Matters

The AA's Auckland infrastructure issues newsletter

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GUIDING LIFE'S JOURNEYS FOR OVER 110 YEARS.

New Zealand Automobile Association



ISSUE 9: Bus and Transit Lanes

From the advocacy team



"Why are bus lanes always empty?"

It's a question we often hear from AA Members, and one we're going to hear a lot more in the years ahead as Auckland Transport (AT) delivers "whole-of-route" improvements to 200km of high-priority bus and transit lanes (with a focus on the arterial roads on the Auckland isthmus).

What the question reflects is that the benefits that bus and transit lanes offer the transport network – in terms of more efficient movement of people – are often not intuitively understood.

This is one of the reasons that bus and transit lanes can stir up so much public sentiment.

Another reason is that, unlike other projects, they don't involve the construction of something new. Rather, they are about reallocation of existing assets, in a way that creates winners and losers.

Issue 9 of Auckland Matters looks at Auckland AA Members' views of bus and transit lanes, and the cycle lanes that will be rolling out alongside them. The question it asks is not whether bus and transit lanes are right for Auckland – there's no doubt they are right (when done well, at least). Rather, the question is: what can AT do to deliver a more effective programme and secure all-important public buy-in?

Barney Irvine
Principal Advisor- Infrastructure

Introduction: Win the middle ground

The officials tasked with delivering AT's expanded bus and transit lane network face a tough task when it comes to getting the public on board, and will need to focus on winning the 'middle ground'.

The results of a recent AA Member survey show an even split between those who support the idea of more bus and transit lanes, those who oppose it, and those in the middle.

On the one hand, this points to an opportunity for AT: with skilful system design and public engagement, there's a chance to convert fence-sitters into supporters. But on the other, it represents risk: false steps could easily see the opposed camp swell to become a solid majority.

The survey results also highlight concern about the impact on retailers if on-street


parking is removed from arterials (even though people were surprisingly open to the removal of parking, in principle) and limited awareness of the rules governing bus and transit lanes. Cycle lanes, meanwhile, polarise people even more than bus and transit lanes.


To win over those in the middle, AT needs to clarify the what, why and how of its programme, and the rules around bus and transit lane use. It also needs to do what it can to soften the impact on those who stand to lose most as a result of its programme (private motorists), and use more carrot and less stick to drive behaviour change.


Bus and transit lane basics:

Bus and transit lanes can maximise the number of people able to travel (in cars or by bus) down busy traffic corridors in the morning and afternoon peaks. They result in more people per vehicle (a full bus carries 50 people, vs 1.2-1.3 in the average car), and because there's less congestion in bus and transit lanes, each of those people is travelling more quickly. That means the average journey time for people on the corridor is shorter.

How does AT choose between T2, T3 and bus only on busy corridors? The number of buses is a key factor, and the following is a typical guideline:

5-10 per hour
 = T2

10-20 per hour
 = T3

20+ per hour
 = BUS ONLY

How much of the load do they carry on busy arterials?

Fanshawe St bus lane carries:



Great North Rd bus lane carries:



Manukau Rd T3 carries:



*All figures for city-bound travel, morning peak

What our Auckland Members are telling us

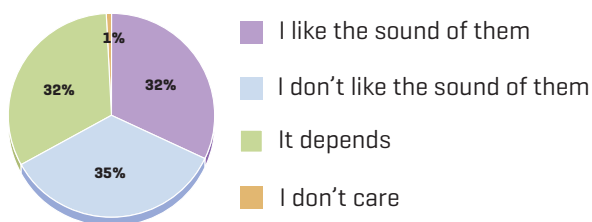
Early this year, we completed an online survey of Auckland AA Members, to better understand their attitudes towards bus and transit lanes, and cycle lanes, and the potential for those lanes to be scaled up across the Auckland isthmus. All up, we received around 700 responses, which gives a margin of error of +/- 3.7%.

Here's what we found:

1 Plenty of support for bus and transit lanes...

Many Auckland AA Members recognise the value that well-designed bus and transit lanes can offer to the transport network, in terms of creating a more credible public transport (PT) alternative and more efficient movement of people. When asked what they think of AT's plans to expand bus and transit lanes on arterial roads, one-third of people were supportive, and a further third indicated that – potentially, at least – they would be open to the idea.

What do you think of AT's transit lane plans?



2 ...but support far from universal

But 35% of people were opposed to AT's plans, reflecting a solid core of opposition to bus and transit lanes as a matter of principle and widespread doubts about AT's current approach to delivering them. Many feel AT has moved too quickly to prioritise public transport access, often for ideological rather than technical reasons, and that this has led to low levels of utilisation of bus and transit lanes and negative impacts on the wider transport network.

"They're always empty!!! Whilst single cars sit in a long queue"

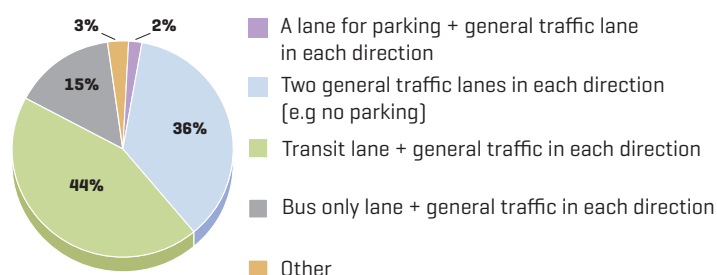
- AA Member

3 T2/T3 yes; bus only no

Reflecting the concerns about utilisation, there was far more support for T2/T3 lanes than for bus only lanes. When asked what the road layout should be on four-lane arterial

roads at peak hour, 44% said that one lane in each direction should be T2/T3, while only 15% said the same lane should be bus only. When it comes to transit lanes, people see T2 as a fairer, more realistic approach than T3 (based on levels of demand).

On busy arterial roads (with two lanes in each direction), what do you think the road layout should be at rush hour?



4 On-street parking not a deal-breaker

The responses on road layout highlight that, more so than in previous AA surveys, people appear open to the idea of on-street parking being removed during peak periods. Only 2% of respondents felt that the arterial road layout at peak times should include a dedicated parking lane, with free-text comments about on-street parking reflecting concern not just for efficiency but also safety.

"Some of the street parking on these roads is very annoying and at times dangerous for other users"

- AA Member

5 But impacts on retailers top of mind

All the same, many were conscious of the impact that removal of on-street parking on arterials would have on businesses, and many indicated that they themselves would alter their behaviour as retail customers in the absence of on-street parking. Of those who said they regularly park on arterial roads, 35% said that they would stop using the shops and services they currently use if parking was

removed for a bus or transit lane, while one third would continue shopping there but would do so less often.

"... less parking makes those shops unattractive and the city poorer when they run down and disappear. AT needs to find a way around this before I'd support it"

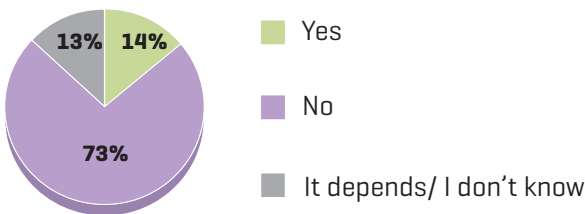
- AA Member

6 Do as I say, not as I do

Despite the body of support for bus and transit lanes, people tend to see them as something *others* would use, rather than a potential catalyst for changing their own behaviour. When asked if they would be more likely to switch to PT if bus and transit lanes were extended, nearly three-quarters said no, with many signalling that changing modes simply wouldn't be practical, even if it meant reduced travel times.

Meanwhile, when asked if they would ever find people to share their trip with, specifically to be able to use a T2 or T3 lane, 70% of respondents said no.

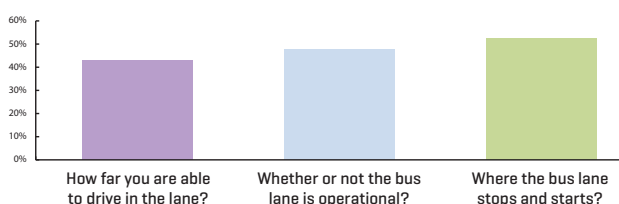
If AT extends the bus/transit lane on the arterial road you use most often, would you be more likely to take the bus?



7 Rules not nearly clear enough

There is widespread confusion over the rules that govern transit lanes, and people reported regularly being caught out. Survey responses showed that, over the last six months: 43% of people had driven in a bus lane and wondered how far they were able to drive in it; 45% had

Over the past six months, have you driven in a bus lane and wondered...



wondered whether or not it was operational; and 52% had wondered where it stopped and started.

8 Cycling also polarises

While survey responses demonstrated a strong degree of goodwill towards cycling (42% said that, rather than waiting for demand, officials should deliver cycle lanes ahead of demand), they also showed a solid core of opposition, often deeply felt.

Much more than with bus lanes, critics of cycle lanes resent perceived over-investment, under-utilisation, and ideologically driven decision-making.

"I'm all for the bus lanes. Definitely against cycle lanes"

- AA Member

9 No cycling trade-offs, thanks

Reflecting some of those concerns, there is limited willingness to trade off access for general traffic or public amenity in return for construction of cycle lanes on busy roads. When asked whether they would support the installation of a cycle lane if it meant the removal of a general traffic lane, only 23% said yes, while 51% were opposed. The proportions were similar if the installation of a cycle lane meant removal of a flush median, removal of on-street parking, or cutting back roadside berms.

10 Separation is key

Whether as a prerequisite for themselves feeling confident enough to get on a bike, whether out of concern for the safety of people who already cycle, or whether to minimise disruption to general traffic flows, there was widespread agreement that cycle lanes should be separated from general traffic and, ideally, located on parallel routes.

"It's awesome to encourage cycling - for population health and community cohesion. But cycling on arterial routes is inefficient (in terms of capacity utilisation) and dangerous... Cycleways can be routed through back roads, parks, reserves, etc"

- AA Member

Recommendations

Here are our recommendations for Auckland Transport:

1 Make the case

AT needs to be far more proactive when it comes to communicating the rationale for its bus and transit lane programme. The story should be told first and foremost in terms of quantifiable transport benefits (based on productivity), and should demonstrate that AT's approach is guided by a clear methodology, particularly when it comes to the transition from general traffic lane to T2, T3 then bus.

Regular, public-facing reporting on the performance of individual bus and transit lanes would go a long way to supporting this. Reporting should consider any impacts on the wider transport network as traffic re-routes (after a bus or transit lane is put in).

2 Soften the blow

Private motorists will wear most of the cost of bus and transit lanes (in terms of travel disruption and delay), particularly those who can't change how or when they travel. This is therefore where the strongest resistance to AT's programme will come from. To limit that resistance, and counter accusations of an anti-car bias, AT must do what it can to 'soften the blow'. Changes should be introduced in an incremental rather than 'big bang' way, and when it comes to border-line calls on when to transition from general traffic lanes to transit or bus lanes, AT should err on the side of least impact to motorists.

Likewise, when deciding on lane configuration, AT needs to get the balance right between minimising travel times for bus users (to provide an attractive PT alternative), and making sure the benefits don't accrue too heavily to a minority of users. In many cases, bus and transit lanes account for 35% or less of person trips on the corridor, which is a long way from the 50% ideal figure stated in AT's own manual.

Where parking is removed from arterials and shifted onto nearby side-streets, the goal should be to provide an equivalent number of parking spaces overall.

Meanwhile, promotion of bus and transit lanes – and cycle lanes, for that matter – should be about encouraging some people to change their travel behaviour some of the time, and not about encouraging wholesale lifestyle changes (which many will find alienating and off-putting).

3 Provide incentives

AT must also provide positive reasons for people to change behaviour, rather than relying on the push factor of increased congestion. Simply encouraging people to 'try carpooling' isn't enough; AT needs to lend its weight to the development of a

high-quality carpooling app (partnering with a successful international offering could be an option), explore the possibility of 'reverse tolls' (where car-pool users receive a small payment for each trip they make), or reserved T2/T3 parking spaces at park and ride stations. AT also needs to invest more in engaging with car-commuting customers to understand what could entice them to switch to PT – whether it's discounted PT fares at certain times, or adjustments to routes and timetables.

4 Clarify the rules

The number of AA Members that admitted to confusion about bus lane rules, and the number of infringements issued by AT annually, underline the need for more to be done to make the rules clearer.

In situations where high numbers of vehicles are entering a bus or transit lane to turn left, special surface marking should be used to highlight the last 50 metres of bus or transit lane before the junction (50 metres being the distance cars are legally allowed to travel in bus and transit lanes before making a turn).

As with speed and red light cameras, all fixed bus and transit lane cameras should be signposted, for reasons of transparency and to change motorists' behaviour before transgressions occur (rather than after the fact). New electronic signage and road markings should be considered, to show when lanes are operational. The efficiency gains of bus and transit lanes can't be realised when people don't adhere to the rules.

5 Cycle lanes – 'and', not 'or'

As far as possible, cycle access should be provided through parallel routes, rather than attempting to shoehorn cycle lanes into the busy arterial corridor. These should be designed to be as streamlined and direct as possible, with intersections along the route configured to give priority to cycling, and designed to accommodate e-bikes and e-scooters as well (to ensure optimal utilisation).

It wouldn't be necessary to have one cycle route to accompany every arterial – rather, the cycle route could sit between two arterials and serve cycle catchment areas along both.

For more information contact:

Barney Irvine
Principal Advisor – Infrastructure
T. +64 9 966 8608
M. +64 27 839 9309