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## Reliability of public transport in Auckland



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# Reliability of public transport in Auckland

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May 2025

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# Deputy Auditor-General's overview

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā karangarangatanga maha o te motu, tēnā koutou.

Each day, thousands of Aucklanders rely on public transport services to get them where they need to be when they need to be there.

Auckland Transport, a council-controlled organisation, is responsible for public transport in Auckland. It must work with local and central government organisations and the private sector to provide public transport services. These organisations also need to co-ordinate effectively to maintain and invest in public transport infrastructure to meet demand over the long term.

The people who use public transport expect reliable and safe services. Research shows that, alongside convenience, concerns about reliability and safety are reasons why someone might choose private vehicles over public transport.

We wanted to understand how Auckland Transport makes sure that it is contributing to reliable and safe public transport services and how well it reports on, and communicates about, its performance.

## What we found

We saw many examples of Auckland Transport working well with Auckland Council, KiwiRail Holdings Limited, operators, and others to improve the reliability and safety of the region's public transport. Together they have carried out work to address bus driver and ferry crew shortages, set up localised safety networks, prioritise late-running buses through intersections, and provide bus replacement services during rail maintenance.

In December 2024, passenger satisfaction with their most recent journey on any service reached 60%, the highest rating since 2022. Even so, and despite Auckland Transport's reliability and safety initiatives, research indicates that public transport is still a choice of last resort for many Aucklanders.

### **Communications about disruptions needs to improve**

Although planned disruptions are generally well managed, unplanned disruptions are a major cause of frustration for those using public transport. Auckland Transport has invested in displays at stops and stations and a mobile app that many people use for information about their journeys.

Auckland Transport informs the public about planned disruptions well, but its complex “back-office” processes and systems make it challenging to manage, and inform people about, unplanned disruptions. In some cases, major disruptions have not been communicated to the public at all.

The severity and impact of incidents are not assessed consistently and this needs to improve. Auckland Transport’s systems for dealing with unplanned disruptions can be overwhelmed when multiple disruptions occur at once.

Auckland Transport relies on up-to-date information from other parties, including operators, to manage unplanned disruptions. If this does not happen in a timely way, it can create significant issues. For example, we saw incident reports that highlighted multiple situations where caregivers and parents were unable to confirm their child’s whereabouts because bus operators did not communicate about disruptions to school bus arrangements in a timely manner.

### **Reporting could better reflect passengers’ experiences**

In its 2023/24 annual report, Auckland Transport said that its services were punctual 88% of the time. However, this reporting combines the performance of buses, ferries, and trains. It is not possible for a reader to understand from the annual report how punctual a particular type of transport is, nor how punctual services on particular routes are.

Auckland Transport considers a bus trip to be punctual if it leaves the first stop between one minute before and five minutes after the scheduled time and arrives at the final stop no later than five minutes after the scheduled time. However, passengers might not ride a bus from the first stop to the last. In our view, it might be more useful to also consider punctuality based on more typical passenger journeys.

We analysed Auckland Transport's data on bus punctuality between 2018 and 2024. We measured punctuality at all bus stops. In our analysis, about a third of buses were either early or late to any given stop in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Our analysis also showed different patterns in different parts of Auckland.

Auckland Transport has recently improved its reliability and punctuality measures. Measures for all services now include cancelled trips and factor in the last stop in a trip. In our view, there is still scope for Auckland Transport's performance measures to better reflect passengers' actual experiences. We encourage Auckland Transport to keep refining the measures that it reports to the public.

Auckland Transport told us it is moving towards a "turn up and go" bus network, which schedules rapid and frequent services on key routes. On these routes, people would not need to rely on the timetable and the frequency of buses arriving will minimise delays or disruptions. This is positive. However, not all bus routes are part of the frequent network or do not yet have high-frequency services in place. In these circumstances, timetables are still necessary for setting passenger expectations about punctuality and to help them to plan their journeys.

### **Planning and monitoring of progress needs improving**

Auckland Transport has set goals for the reliability of public transport. It has carried out many initiatives to improve reliability, such as preparing an asset management plan with KiwiRail Holdings Limited to understand how scheduled rail maintenance will disrupt public transport services. Many more initiatives are proposed.

Similarly, Auckland Transport has set goals for public safety and has work under way to address passenger safety concerns, and more initiatives are intended.

In our view, more detailed implementation planning is needed to ensure that these initiatives are successful and that Auckland Transport is well-positioned to achieve its reliability and safety goals. Auckland Transport also needs to regularly monitor the progress of initiatives and measure their impact.

## Final comments

Auckland Transport has carried out significant work to improve public transport's reliability and safety in Auckland during the last two years. There is still more to do.

Auckland Transport needs to improve its implementation planning, monitor its progress, and prioritise work that focuses on reliability and safety – including how it manages disruptions. It could also improve how it describes performance in ways that better reflects passengers' experiences and provide more accessible public reporting.

We have made five recommendations to support Auckland Transport to improve its communication, planning, and reporting. We encourage all regional public transport authorities to consider whether the findings in this report are also relevant to them.

We thank staff at Auckland Transport for their assistance. We also thank the representatives from other organisations and groups we heard from – Auckland Transport's Whaikaha Advisory Group, Auckland Council, the New Zealand Police, and KiwiRail Holdings Limited – who provided valuable contributions to this work.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Andrew McConnell', with a stylized, looping initial 'A' and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Andrew McConnell  
Deputy Controller and Auditor-General

7 May 2025



# Our recommendations

We recommend that Auckland Transport:

1. more clearly describe the difference planned actions will make to its goals for public transport reliability and safety, how it will monitor the progress of those actions, and how it will mitigate risks to achieving these goals;
2. develop criteria to determine when it will review its responses to disruptions, and define how it will use what it learns from those reviews to inform ongoing improvements;
3. improve processes for managing unplanned disruptions to services, including for school bus services, and consider ways to better inform the public about unplanned disruptions;
4. review the information it holds about passengers' experiences to help inform service improvements and improve performance reporting (to allow the public, Auckland Council, and others to better understand how reliable public transport is in Auckland); and
5. increase the accessibility of information available to the public about how Auckland's public transport services are performing.

# 1

## What we looked at and why

- 1.1 Auckland is New Zealand's largest city and home to more than a third of the country's population. Auckland Transport is a council-controlled organisation, responsible for public transport in Auckland.
- 1.2 Public transport benefits Auckland in many ways. It connects residents and visitors to their places of work and leisure, helps to reduce congestion for all road users, and reduces carbon emissions.
- 1.3 In 2023/24, about 87 million individual trips were taken on Auckland's buses, ferries, and trains. By 2031, Auckland Transport aims to almost double this number to provide 150 million trips on public transport each year.
- 1.4 In a 2023 survey from the Ministry of Transport, 43% of Aucklanders reported using public transport at some point in the previous 12 months. The reliability of public transport is an important factor in whether people choose to travel by bus, train, or ferry, and influences their satisfaction with it when they do use it.
- 1.5 Auckland Transport's research shows that the top three barriers to people using public transport are that it takes them too long to get to where they want to go, that they need to take multiple services, and that it is not reliable.
- 1.6 Many factors determine how reliable public transport is for passengers (such as access, scheduling, sense of safety, and transferring between services). In this report, we focus on timeliness and safety.
- 1.7 There is evidence that reliability has reduced throughout Auckland's public transport network in recent years. Covid-19, a shortage of bus drivers and ferry crew, and ongoing rail maintenance have all disrupted services, meaning more cancellations and reduced service levels at peak times and on main routes.

### Why we did this work

- 1.8 Section 104 of the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009 requires the Auditor-General to review the service performance of Auckland Council and each of its council-controlled organisations from time to time.
- 1.9 In terms of spending, Auckland Transport is the largest of Auckland Council's five main council-controlled organisations.
- 1.10 It is important that Parliament and the public have assurance about public transport services in Auckland, particularly given the level of recent disruptions. We considered that our work could also be useful for other organisations responsible for public transport networks.

## What we looked at

- 1.11 We wanted to find out how well Auckland Transport is ensuring the reliability of buses, trains, and ferries in Auckland.
- 1.12 We wanted to answer two main questions:
- How effectively does Auckland Transport contribute to reliable public transport?
  - How effectively does Auckland Transport report and communicate about the reliability of public transport services?
- 1.13 Our audit focused on Auckland Transport. However, the successful operation of Auckland's public transport network relies on a range of public organisations and private companies. We outline their roles and responsibilities in Part 2.

## How we did our audit

- 1.14 We reviewed documents that Auckland Transport provided and some that were publicly available. These included strategy and planning documents, governance documents, process documents and policies, operator contracts, performance reports, project management reports, and minutes of meetings.
- 1.15 We interviewed staff at Auckland Transport from the public transport, customer service, and strategy and planning groups. We held a focus group with Auckland Transport's Whaikaha Public Transport Advisory Group, which advises Auckland Transport on accessibility matters. We also interviewed staff at Auckland Council, a selection of elected members and local board chairpersons, and spoke to officials from KiwiRail Holdings Limited (KiwiRail) and the New Zealand Police.
- 1.16 We analysed a range of data that Auckland Transport provided, including customer survey results and complaints data, information about schedule adherence and patronage, and other performance information.

# 2

## Auckland's public transport system is complex

### Auckland Transport is the regional public transport authority

- 2.1 Auckland Transport spends about \$1.8 billion each year and employs more than 1900 staff.
- 2.2 Set up under the Auckland Council (Local Government Act) 2009, Auckland Transport is a regional public transport authority. Its purpose is to contribute to an effective, efficient, and safe Auckland transport system in the public interest.
- 2.3 Auckland Transport's responsibilities include:
  - identifying and contracting public transport services (buses, trains, and ferries);
  - monitoring and reviewing the performance of public transport services;
  - providing information about public transport services in Auckland;
  - upgrading and maintaining key public transport infrastructure; and
  - preparing and approving Auckland's regional public transport plan.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.4 It is responsible for providing more than 12,000 bus services, 500 rail services, and 300 ferry services each day.
- 2.5 Unlike other regional public transport authorities, Auckland Transport is also a road-controlling authority. It is responsible for planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining Auckland's roads, cycleways, and footpaths.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.6 Auckland Transport is responsible for managing most of the contracts and services for school buses in Auckland and for the Total Mobility service. School bus services were within the scope of our audit, but the Total Mobility service (which subsidises transport for people with long-term impairments) was under review when we carried out our audit, and so was out of scope.
- 2.7 Public transport in Auckland is funded through a mix of funding from Auckland Council and central government (through the National Land Transport Fund, administered by the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi), as well as revenue from public transport fares and other sources (such as advertising, income from land held for future transport needs, and parking enforcement).
- 2.8 Auckland Transport is governed by a Board of Directors, who are appointed by its sole shareholder, Auckland Council. The Board employs Auckland Transport's Chief Executive, who is responsible for the organisation's day-to-day management.

1 Proposals were announced in December 2024 that would transfer the responsibility for approving the regional land transport plan and regional public transport plan from Auckland Transport to Auckland Council.

2 Proposals were announced in December 2024 that would transfer the road-controlling authority responsibilities from Auckland Transport to Auckland Council, giving greater decision-making powers to Auckland's 21 local boards.

## Auckland Transport works with many other organisations

### Setting the direction and goals for public transport

- 2.9 Several strategies and plans, produced by multiple central and local government organisations, guide Auckland Transport in managing the public transport system (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

**Many organisations' strategies and plans shape the direction of public transport in Auckland**



- 2.10 Auckland Council sets the broader long-term strategic direction for land transport in the region through the *Auckland Plan 2050*. Auckland Council also contributes to each Government Policy Statement on land transport, produced by the Ministry of Transport. The current Government Policy Statement is the *Government Policy Statement on land transport 2024/25-2033/34*.
- 2.11 Auckland Transport has a long-term network plan called *Future Connect*. This plan identifies critical issues and opportunities for the transport network, and informs the *Auckland Regional Land Transport Plan 2024-2034*. The regional plan and *Future Connect* both guide Auckland Transport's *Regional Public Transport Plan 2023-2031* (the Public Transport Plan).
- 2.12 Regional transport network planning, including public transport network planning, also needs to align with the *National Land Transport Programme 2024-27*, which is produced by the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi.
- 2.13 The Public Transport Plan is the document that sets Auckland Transport's specific goals for public transport (see Part 3).
- 2.14 Auckland Transport's statement of intent details the work Auckland Transport will do over three years to focus on the goals in the Public Transport Plan.
- 2.15 Auckland Council's 21 local boards also have a role. They prepare local plans to reflect their communities' aspirations and priorities for transport, which also inform the Regional Land Transport Plan.

### **Co-ordination is needed to manage public transport infrastructure**

- 2.16 Although Auckland Transport is responsible for planning and providing public transport services, it does not own or control all of the infrastructure.
- 2.17 Auckland Transport owns the trains and train stations that form part of Auckland's metropolitan network. KiwiRail owns and maintains other rail network infrastructure, including tracks, signals, power supply, and bridges. Auckland's metropolitan trains also share the network with KiwiRail's rail freight services. KiwiRail is upgrading the rail network and working with Auckland Transport to prepare for the opening of the City Rail Link in 2026.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.18 Auckland Transport owns most (but not all) of Auckland's bus stops and shelters. It does not own the buses or the roads.
- 2.19 As outlined in paragraph 2.5, Auckland Transport is Auckland's road-controlling authority and is responsible for the non-state highway network. The New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi is responsible for the state highways.

<sup>3</sup> The City Rail Link will add new rail tunnels and underground stations, redevelop some existing stations, and provide other network improvements.

- 2.20 Auckland Transport owns four of the 27 vessels in the public ferry fleet. Private operators own the rest.
- 2.21 Auckland Transport's ability to provide effective, efficient, and safe public transport services also depend on a range of other local and central government organisations and the private sector. Auckland Transport needs to co-ordinate well with these organisations to be successful.

### **Private operators are contracted to provide bus, train, and ferry services**

- 2.22 Auckland One Rail Limited (Auckland One Rail) is contracted to provide metropolitan rail services on behalf of Auckland Transport. It is responsible for operating trains, recruiting and employing drivers and other staff, preparing timetables, operating and maintaining stations, and managing security and customer service. From 2025, Auckland One Rail will also take responsibility for train maintenance.
- 2.23 Auckland Transport has contracts with seven bus operators: Kinetic (which operates New Zealand Bus and Go Bus),<sup>4</sup> Ritchie's Transport, Howick and Eastern Buses, Pavlovich Transport Solutions, Fullers360 (which operates the Waiheke Bus Company), Bayes Coachlines, and Tranzit Group (which operates Tranzurban Auckland).
- 2.24 These operators are contracted to provide bus services (including most of the school bus services in Auckland). They employ the bus drivers and support staff.
- 2.25 Auckland's passenger ferry fleet is made up of 27 vessels that are operated by four private companies: Fullers360, SeaLink, Belaire Ferries Limited, and Explore Group.
- 2.26 Although private operators provide public transport services in Auckland, Auckland Transport remains responsible for meeting the performance targets for public transport set out in its accountability documents.
- 2.27 To ensure that the public receives value for money from these contracts and that services are reliable, it is crucial that Auckland Transport monitors and reviews its operators' performance and takes action to improve performance when necessary.

4 Kinetic is the largest provider of bus services in Auckland. It operates 650 city buses throughout the region.

### **Auckland Transport actively manages operator performance**

- 2.28 Auckland Transport uses minimum service standards and contractually agreed key performance indicators and targets to encourage operators to provide reliable and punctual services.
- 2.29 Auckland Transport can set minimum performance expectations and manage performance by applying financial penalties or giving bonuses. It can also terminate or not renew contracts for poor-performing operators.
- 2.30 Although key performance indicators in contracts apply throughout the duration of the contract, the measures for reliability and punctuality in Auckland Transport's statement of intent can change every three years.
- 2.31 At the time of our audit, key performance indicator targets for punctuality and reliability in the operator contracts we reviewed were set higher than the performance measure targets in the statement of intent.
- 2.32 Higher targets assist Auckland Transport to manage both individual and overall performance because they encourage operators to work with Auckland Transport to keep improving the overall performance of all public transport services in Auckland over time.
- 2.33 Auckland Transport has dedicated relationship managers in place for its operators. Operators are required to attend performance committees, as well as other performance-focused forums (some of these are discussed below). We saw examples of Auckland Transport raising concerns about off-track performance in these forums, which led to commitments by operators to fix issues.
- 2.34 Auckland Transport set up an internal Service Change Steering Group and associated working group in April 2024.
- 2.35 The purpose of the steering group and working group is to oversee and implement the changes needed to improve bus, train, and ferry services.
- 2.36 The steering group meets regularly and includes senior leaders from across Auckland Transport. The steering group provides direction to the working group about any service changes required. The working group then works with operators to make agreed changes (for example, adding new services, revising timetabling, or increasing vehicle size to add capacity).



- 2.37 A Poor Performance Group formed in early 2024 to review bus services that were not meeting expectations. The group now meets monthly to establish plans to fix route-specific performance issues.
- 2.38 The Poor Performance Group reviews performance using information in monthly operational performance reports. These reports were introduced in May 2024 and provide updates on key activities, insights, and risks. They also give reliability and punctuality scores for each type of transport and operator.
- 2.39 Although ferry and train performance information is provided in the monthly operational report, ferry and train services are not discussed by the Poor Performance Group. We were told this is because ferry and train performance is measured differently to buses. For example, boardings per hour is not calculated for ferries, and trains have relatively stable timetables and frequency of services. We were told that Auckland Transport plans to include performance of ferries in the Poor Performance Group later in 2025, but there are still no plans to include trains.
- 2.40 We support Auckland Transport's intention to consider the other types of public transport performance as part of the Poor Performance Group. We think this is particularly important for maintaining focus on reviewing and improving performance across all services, particularly given previous issues with reliability and punctuality across all types of transport (see Figures 3 and 4 in Part 5).

# 3

## Better planning and monitoring of reliability and safety goals is needed

- 3.1 To be able to effectively co-ordinate service improvements, it is important that Auckland Transport has clear goals and plans that describe how it proposes to achieve them. These are also important to provide the public with information about how Auckland Transport proposes to improve public transport services.
- 3.2 We expected Auckland Transport to have clear goals to improve the reliability and safety of public transport. We expected it to monitor its progress towards these goals by regularly tracking and measuring the impact of any work designed to improve reliability and safety. We also expected Auckland Transport to consider what else it might need to do if initiatives are not having the expected impact.
- 3.3 Auckland Transport has set five goals for public transport for 2023-31. Although we have seen evidence of a range of initiatives under way or proposed that are associated with these goals, the documents we were provided did not always describe the results or benefits those initiatives will achieve, when those benefits could be expected, or how the initiatives help Auckland Transport meet its goals.

### Auckland Transport has goals that relate to reliability and safety

- 3.4 As noted in Part 2, several strategies and plans inform the Public Transport Plan, which is the main strategic document for Auckland's public transport network.
- 3.5 The Public Transport Plan sets out five eight-year goals for public transport. They are:
- *Goal 1: Services providing an excellent customer experience.*<sup>5</sup>
  - *Goal 2: Enhancing the environment and tackling the climate emergency.*
  - *Goal 3: Safe and accessible transport for everyone.*
  - *Goal 4: Integrating public transport into a growing Auckland.*
  - *Goal 5: Funding and delivering public transport transparently.*
- 3.6 Auckland Transport's statement of intent for 2024 to 2027 explains its priorities for those three years and how they will contribute to Auckland Council's longer-term outcomes and the Public Transport Plan's eight-year goals.
- 3.7 The priorities in the statement of intent describe where Auckland Transport considers it needs to move quickly to improve outcomes for Auckland. These are:
- *Making every interaction count.*
  - *Taking public transport from good to great.*
  - *Improving network productivity.*

<sup>5</sup> This goal includes several aspects of reliability: service planning and network design, rapid and frequent infrastructure and services, quality and performance of services, and customer experience information and technology.

- *Effective governance and advocacy for transport outcomes.*
- *Value for money* (including growing external revenue).

## Planning does not clearly show how Auckland Transport will achieve its goals

- 3.8 We expected Auckland Transport to have implementation plans setting out how it will meet the Public Transport Plan's reliability and safety goals (Goals 1 and 3).
- 3.9 Auckland Transport's current statement of intent indicates that it will implement the Public Transport Plan through two programmes as part of its focus on "Taking public transport from good to great". The two programmes are the Public Transport Growth Programme and the Public Transport Service Network Optimisation initiative.
- 3.10 The Public Transport Growth Programme is made up of 77 projects that Auckland Transport says will "provide reliable services and customer experiences that accelerate patronage growth" in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
- 3.11 We saw information about funding status and a "definition of done" for each of the Public Transport Growth projects, but we did not see plans that set out milestones, timing, or interdependencies of those projects, or describe the risks to achieving them. We also did not see documentation that clearly described expected benefits or how these projects would achieve Auckland Transport's goals.
- 3.12 Documents we saw relevant to "Taking public transport from good to great" provided some evidence of implementation planning for other projects, including some information about risks and dependencies. For example, we saw a template where staff were asked to set out target outcomes, risks, prioritisation, how success will be measured, resourcing, and dates for activities. However, this documentation was not filled out consistently and sections were often left blank.
- 3.13 Overall, we did not see the level of planning needed to provide confidence that Auckland Transport will successfully implement these projects.
- 3.14 This also meant it was difficult for us to form a clear view of the projects Auckland Transport intends to complete, when it intends to complete them, and how much these activities will contribute to the goals in the Public Transport Plan.
- 3.15 In our view, ensuring that planning is completed for all strategic priority projects will enable Auckland Transport to provide a clearer sense of its progress toward the Public Transport Plan's reliability and safety goals. This is important to keep momentum and remain on target.

### Auckland Transport needs to show whether it is meeting its goals for reliability

- 3.16 Improving reliability is a key part of *Goal 1: Services providing an excellent customer experience*.
- 3.17 This goal is described in the Public Transport Plan as being about providing convenient and competitive travel options that meet Aucklanders' needs, including frequent and reliable travel times and easily accessible information.
- 3.18 Auckland Transport staff told us that they understand how important it is for services to be reliable. They told us that it is a focus for Auckland Transport every day and described it as the crux of everything they do.
- 3.19 The Public Transport Plan has a specific short-term focus on fixing immediate reliability issues, including staff shortages on buses and ferries and mitigating the impact of rail closures due to rail infrastructure upgrades for the City Rail Link.
- 3.20 We have seen evidence that Auckland Transport is already working on these reliability issues.
- 3.21 For example, at the peak of the bus driver shortage in 2022, Auckland Transport needed 578 more drivers to operate Auckland's buses reliably. It worked with operators to reach the full requirement of bus drivers in late 2023.
- 3.22 Auckland Transport also responded to a shortage of ferry crew in late 2023 by working with the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi, the Ministry of Transport, and the operator to set up a Ferry Accelerated Training Programme. The programme involved providing additional assistance (such as training and development and immigration assistance) to increase crew member capacity.
- 3.23 In 2022 and 2023, Auckland Transport cancelled some services at short notice because of a lack of qualified crew and because ferries were needed for training. Auckland Transport replaced some ferry services with buses and reduced the number of trips for other ferry services.
- 3.24 Auckland Transport saw these temporary changes as necessary to assist the operator to return services back to full capacity. By November 2024, Auckland Transport indicated that services were back to pre-training programme levels.
- 3.25 Auckland Transport has also invested in new electric and electric hybrid ferries.<sup>6</sup> These are expected to have fewer mechanical issues than the operator-owned diesel vessels. The first ferry is expected to be handed over to Auckland Transport in September 2025.

- 3.26 For buses, Auckland Transport has focused on bus priority systems as part of its Public Transport Service Network Optimisation initiative. Bus priority systems use GPS units in buses and smart traffic lights to prioritise late-running buses at intersections at peak times. Dynamic bus lanes are reserved for buses at certain times. These strategies help buses run on time, especially in traffic congestion.
- 3.27 At the end of 2024, 75 intersections in Auckland were set up to prioritise buses that are running late. Auckland Transport intends to have about 20 more by June 2025. Auckland Transport's analysis indicates that the bus priority technology helps save about 30% of time on affected routes.
- 3.28 Dynamic bus lanes keep lanes available for buses during specific times. The first set of dynamic bus lanes is expected to be in place in mid-2025. Auckland Transport is working closely with Auckland Council and the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi on these lanes.
- 3.29 As discussed in paragraph 2.17, Auckland's metropolitan rail network infrastructure is owned and maintained by KiwiRail. KiwiRail sometimes applies temporary speed restrictions to allow trains to run safely while mitigating risks associated with infrastructure defects or maintenance activities, rather than resorting to full line closures. Speed restrictions are one of the causes for delays and disruptions to train services.
- 3.30 Although Auckland Transport is not responsible for KiwiRail's rail maintenance, we saw evidence that Auckland Transport is proactively working with Auckland One Rail and KiwiRail to minimise the effects of planned maintenance work.
- 3.31 For example, Auckland Transport and KiwiRail have worked together on an asset management plan for Auckland's rail network. This gives Auckland Transport advance notice of planned disruptions and input into the sequencing of maintenance work to ensure that it can provide alternative services.
- 3.32 Overall, we saw evidence that Auckland Transport is prioritising and has progressed a range of actions to improve the reliability of services. These actions are aligned to its legislated purpose of contributing to effective and efficient land transport.
- 3.33 However, in our view, Auckland Transport could more clearly explain the results expected of each initiative and how those results will impact the Public Transport Plan's overarching goal to provide an excellent customer experience. Doing so would show that the initiatives Auckland Transport is prioritising are aligned to what it has told the public to expect – a public transport system that is fast, frequent, reliable, convenient, and safe.

### Auckland Transport's goals for personal safety

- 3.34 When using public transport, people come together in what are often compact spaces. Challenges that some members of the community face, including mental health problems, addiction, and violence, can cause tensions in these spaces. Concerns about personal safety (feeling able to use public transport without threat, fear, or harm) can discourage people from using public transport.
- 3.35 Auckland Transport's role is to contribute to an effective, efficient, and safe land transport system in the public interest. It also has obligations to Auckland Council, as a council-controlled organisation, to make Auckland's transport system safe by preventing harm to people.
- 3.36 Auckland Transport's focus on personal safety is part of Goal 3 in the Public Transport Plan: *"Safe and accessible transport for everyone"*. This goal has a focus on making sure public transport is safe for people of all ages, abilities, and identities, with fewer reported incidents and an increased perception of safety and security throughout the network. The Public Transport Plan emphasises the importance of integrating safety measures into the design and operation of the transport system.
- 3.37 We expected to see an overall plan for how Auckland Transport intends to address personal safety and perceptions of safety on public transport, the actions it intends to take, an intended sequence, and timelines for those actions. We expected a plan would also describe the difference these actions would make towards the safety goal and include measures to monitor it. We did not see evidence of this kind of planning or specific measures related to personal safety.
- 3.38 However, we did see that Auckland Transport has initiatives under way that respond to personal safety concerns on Auckland's public transport network. They include:
- safety on buses, including training drivers in de-escalation techniques, installing protective screens for bus drivers, and fitting buses with closed-circuit television video surveillance (CCTV) systems and panic buttons;
  - extending Auckland Transport's CCTV network;
  - location-based initiatives such as Operation Haumaru, a collaborative safety plan led by Auckland Transport, the New Zealand Police, and Auckland Council for West Auckland transport hubs;<sup>7</sup>
  - planning an "active bystander" campaign to encourage people who notice harmful behaviour on public transport to intervene; and
  - improving the design of public transport hubs, stations, and stops, such as by installing better lighting.

<sup>7</sup> Operation Haumaru was a New Zealand Police-led operation that ran for two months in 2024. It increased security in response to safety concerns at New Lynn and Henderson transport hubs.

- 3.39 Auckland Transport employs Transport Officers to help manage personal safety and security on the network and at transport hubs. Auckland Transport and its operators also hire security guards to support passengers' and transport workers' sense of personal safety.
- 3.40 Transport Officers are responsible for fare enforcement duties (such as inspecting tickets and issuing infringement notices) and are a point of contact for passengers. In April 2025, Auckland Transport employed 63 Transport Officers.
- 3.41 Auckland Transport also works with the New Zealand Police to respond to incidents on the network. In emergencies, Transport Officers are required to assist the New Zealand Police and operators. Auckland Transport facilitates information-sharing from operator staff and witnesses and provides CCTV footage to the New Zealand Police. Auckland Transport can also send safety incident reports to the New Zealand Police.
- 3.42 We saw examples of Auckland Transport's specific strategies and action plans related to other safety initiatives (such as the Vision Zero Transport Strategy, which aims to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries on Auckland's transport network, including public transport). Auckland Transport's Safety, Health, and Wellbeing Strategy focuses on developing a stronger safety culture.
- 3.43 However, when we carried out our audit, Auckland Transport did not have an overarching plan for further improving the personal safety of passengers. We understand that Auckland Transport is now working on a proposed Crime Prevention Plan. The first phase of work is to analyse its information to identify trends and factors contributing to passengers feeling unsafe, examine responses to date, and propose options for managing crime on public transport.
- 3.44 Auckland Transport told us its Crime Prevention Plan will be in place by July 2025. We encourage Auckland Transport to prioritise this work. In our view, it will be important to clearly explain how personal safety initiatives included in the plan will contribute to the overall safety goal.

## Monitoring and reporting is not well connected to the goals

- 3.45 The goals in the Public Transport Plan are monitored using performance measures. For *Goal 1: Services providing an excellent customer experience*, the measures and targets are:
- patronage (150 million by 2031);
  - satisfaction (maintain current levels to 2031);
  - access to strategic public transport services (57% by 2031);
  - reliability at the first stop (98% by 2031); and
  - punctuality at the first and last stop (92% by 2031).
- 3.46 For *Goal 3: Safe and accessible services for everyone*, the measures are:
- access to public transport services (maintain 90% to 2031);
  - access to public transport in socio-economic deprived areas (67% by 2031); and
  - access to late-night services (79% by 2031).
- 3.47 The Public Transport Plan states that Auckland Transport will prepare a monitoring framework to report its progress against the measures and report its progress with the actions and service improvements included in the plan.
- 3.48 The measures and targets in place for the Public Transport Plan are a good start. Auckland Transport now needs to monitor the progress and impacts of specific actions and service improvements. Auckland Transport also needs to monitor interdependencies between initiatives and any risks to meeting goals so it can appropriately manage them.
- 3.49 We reviewed Auckland Transport's monthly operational performance report. We were told that this internal report provides Auckland Transport with an indication of its overall performance.
- 3.50 The monthly operational performance reports provide monthly results for statement of intent measures, including reliability and punctuality, and indicate how many actions are on track, as well as any important insights, risks, and mitigation steps.
- 3.51 The reports also provide progress updates on the Public Transport Growth Programme, which is one of the programmes that Auckland Transport intends to use to implement the Public Transport Plan. Although the reports set out the number of on-track, in progress, and not-started actions, they do not specifically identify which actions are in each category. The programme is due for completion at the end of June 2025.



- 3.52 In our view, the monthly operational performance reports do not provide governors and senior management with enough information to understand the progress of specific actions. Auckland Transport told us that it will prepare a report for its internal governance and Auckland Council to update them on the Public Transport Growth Programme by August 2025.
- 3.53 To understand Auckland Transport's progress towards reaching its safety goal, we reviewed separate health and safety reports that provide updates on the risk of violence, threats, and aggression towards employees and contractors on the network. These reports indicate some progress with personal safety initiatives, such as installing driver screens.
- 3.54 However, Auckland Transport does not include the performance measures outlined in the Public Transport Plan for its safety goal in either the monthly operational performance reports or its health and safety reporting. Auckland Transport's annual report for the most recent financial year also does not include these performance measures. Therefore, it is unclear how Auckland Transport is monitoring this goal or where people can access information about its safety performance measures.
- 3.55 In our view, there are also opportunities to better connect Auckland Transport's safety measures in the Public Transport Plan to its safety goal, for example by considering the number of incidents and perceptions of safety on the network.

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#### **Recommendation 1**

We recommend that Auckland Transport more clearly describe the difference planned actions will make to its goals for public transport reliability and safety, how it will monitor the progress of those actions, and how it will mitigate risks to achieving these goals.

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# 4

## Disruptions need to be better managed and communicated

- 4.1 Disruptions – when services do not run, or do not run to schedule – are an inevitable part of any public transport system. Some disruptions are planned and known about in advance. Others can occur with little to no notice.
- 4.2 Frequent disruptions can undermine public confidence in the public transport system and people’s willingness to use it. We expected Auckland Transport to provide people with clear and accurate information about its services and inform them of planned changes and unexpected disruptions in a consistent and timely way.
- 4.3 We also expected Auckland Transport to identify and mitigate the risks of disruptions to public transport services and to minimise the effects of those disruptions where possible.
- 4.4 Auckland Transport manages between 67 and 144 disruptions every day. In our view, it is generally effective at managing planned disruptions, but unplanned disruptions are more challenging.
- 4.5 Although Auckland Transport has invested in user-facing portals to better inform people about disruptions, its “back-office” processes for managing and communicating disruptions are complex and involve many different people, tasks, and systems. In our view, Auckland Transport needs to improve these processes if it is to meet the public’s expectations that it communicates information about disruptions in a consistent and timely way.
- 4.6 Auckland Transport is aware from surveys and other research it has commissioned that it needs to improve how it manages and informs the public about disruptions. Auckland Transport is in the early stages of a work programme to make improvements.

### Technology has improved access to information

- 4.7 In recent years, Auckland Transport has invested in a range of technologies to improve how people access information about public transport services, including information about services’ timeliness.
- 4.8 The AT Mobile app is Auckland Transport’s main channel for communicating information about services and service disruptions. About 300,000 people access AT Mobile each month.
- 4.9 AT Mobile includes a range of features, such as:
  - a journey planner to help people plan their journey by private vehicle, public transport, walking, and cycling;
  - customisable service alerts to notify people when their routes are disrupted; and
  - a “live departures” function that allows people to track the location of buses.

- 4.10 In 2020, Auckland Transport added a train line status to AT Mobile to show live train departures. A similar function to show live tracking of ferries was added in 2024.
- 4.11 Public information displays include digital signs at stops and stations that provide up-to-date service information. Auckland Transport told us that it has installed 970 of these displays throughout the network (this accounts for about 15% of its stops).
- 4.12 Auckland Transport targeted its roll-out to high-patronage stops, which account for about 67% of passenger traffic. It told us that it intends to increase the number of displays.
- 4.13 Auckland Transport also keeps the public informed about its services and any disruptions to its services through its social media channels and updates on the Auckland Transport website.
- 4.14 However, although Auckland Transport has invested in technology to make it easier for people to access information about the status and timeliness of services, the information available through such portals might not always be accurate. We discuss this in more detail in paragraphs 4.49-4.55.

### **Processes for managing planned disruptions work well**

- 4.15 Auckland Transport defines a planned disruption as a disruption to scheduled services that it knows about at least five days beforehand. Examples include temporary road closures because of roadworks or events, reduced train services because of speed restrictions, or ferry cancellations to allow for cruise ship arrivals and departures.
- 4.16 Auckland Transport's Day of Operations team is responsible for working with the Auckland Transport Information team to keep people informed of any disruptions to services. Another smaller team works alongside them to prepare for planned disruptions, and a separate team manages public transport arrangements for special events such as concerts, sport games, protests, and festivals.
- 4.17 Auckland Transport's processes for handling planned disruptions are generally effective.
- 4.18 We saw detailed guidance for staff on how to work with others to manage and communicate about planned disruptions, and a range of examples of these processes working in practice.
- 4.19 For example, Auckland Transport has been involved in a programme of rail upgrades since 2023 to prepare the rail network for the opening of the City

Rail Link. Auckland Transport's planning for the rail upgrades shows how it communicates information about planned disruptions to stakeholders and the public through a range of formats and channels. Planning we saw included reviewing public transport usage data to better understand people's journeys and plan alternative services.

### **Managing unplanned disruptions is more challenging**

- 4.20 Unplanned disruptions occur with little or no notice. They include bus delays or diversions because of traffic accidents, service delays or cancellations because of severe weather, and cancellations because of breakdowns or mechanical issues. In some instances, a planned disruption might become unplanned, such as when scheduled roadworks are delayed.
- 4.21 Auckland Transport told us that unplanned disruptions can be challenging to manage. This is because they need a faster response and tend to have greater impact in real time.

### **Complex processes affect the timeliness of communications**

- 4.22 Many people and processes are involved in managing and informing people about unplanned disruptions.
- 4.23 In 2023, Auckland Transport commissioned a "disruption communication system map". The consultants who developed the map described the communications system as the most complex they had ever mapped, based on the large numbers of people and actions involved. For example, informing the public about an unplanned rail disruption could involve up to 20 different people at Auckland Transport, KiwiRail, and Auckland One Rail.
- 4.24 Auckland Transport told us that the opening of the Auckland Rail Operations Centre in Ellerslie in March 2024 has assisted with these processes. The establishment of this centre is the result of collaboration between Auckland Transport (including Day of Operations and Auckland Transport Information team staff), KiwiRail, and Auckland One Rail. It provides a central location where all three agencies can work together to control and monitor the rail network.
- 4.25 Auckland Transport is aware that its processes for managing and communicating about unplanned disruptions are complicated and time-consuming. We were told that only 3% of the actions involved are automated. Most need manual handling or processing by staff in multiple teams.
- 4.26 We discuss the work Auckland Transport has under way to improve this in paragraphs 4.70-4.78.

### Systems for managing disruptions rely on dated technology and manual processes

- 4.27 As with planned disruptions, the Day of Operations team works closely with the Auckland Transport Information team to manage unplanned disruptions.
- 4.28 Auckland Transport supports more than 12,000 bus services, 500 rail services, and 300 ferry services each day. Staff told us that, given the number of daily public transport services the Day of Operations team manages, they must rely on others, including operators and members of the public, to alert them to what is happening on the network.
- 4.29 A system called “Command Centre” gives Day of Operations staff and public transport operators access to real-time data on the location and status of bus, train, and ferry services.
- 4.30 Command Centre has a range of analytical functions, including the ability to receive alerts about the status of individual services. This includes information about whether services have not started or have been cancelled, whether they are running on time, and the number of passengers on board.
- 4.31 Despite the functions the Command Centre has, operators still need to notify Auckland Transport about the nature of the disruption and staff must enter that information into the system. This means that the processes for identifying and managing disruptions – particularly how they are communicated – remain largely manual.
- 4.32 The Day of Operations team’s main channel for receiving information about disruptions is a service disruptions email address that Auckland Transport teams and operators use.
- 4.33 As well as emails, the Day of Operations team also receives information about disruptions through messages from operators, monitoring CCTV footage, and complaints made to Auckland Transport’s call centre.
- 4.34 Command Centre cannot automatically generate text alerts or notifications. Instead, after the Day of Operations team receives information about a disruption, it must pass that information on to Auckland Transport Information staff. Those staff manually update information about the disruption in Command Centre, using pre-approved templates to generate alerts and notifications to the public.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Several manual steps are needed to update AT Mobile, public information displays and live departures, and the website journey planner tool. Notices and alerts through Auckland Transport’s social media channels are published through a separate application.

- 4.35 Similarly, Auckland Transport lacks an automated process for generating and communicating detours to bus services when disruptions occur. Instead, Day of Operations staff must decide on an alternative route for bus operators to use and manually update it into Command Centre through a separate mobile app called Remix. This ensures that the alternative route appears on Auckland Transport's digital channels, such as AT Mobile and journey planner.

**Auckland Transport has limited ability to communicate about disruptions out of hours**

- 4.36 One consequence of the reliance on manual processes is that it provides limited or no information about unplanned disruptions that occur outside of Auckland Transport's business hours. The Day of Operations team works from 5am to 9pm on weekdays and 8.30am to 5.30pm on weekends and public holidays.
- 4.37 In 2023, at a workshop organised by Auckland Transport on communicating about disruptions, participants (who included operator staff and Auckland Transport staff) highlighted that not communicating about disruptions that occur to public transport outside of business hours was unlikely to meet the public's expectations.
- 4.38 Auckland Transport has recently extended the team's hours by one hour because many disruptions occur overnight or early in the morning. The Auckland Transport Information team operates similar hours but starts an hour later on weekdays, at 6am.
- 4.39 Auckland Transport told us that, in their view, this time period covers most services and few customers would be affected outside of these hours.
- 4.40 Auckland Transport has after-hours communications arrangements with its rail operator, Auckland One Rail, and Fullers, its main ferry operator. However, Auckland Transport has no documented out-of-hours communications arrangements for its other ferry operators or for its seven bus operators.

### **Auckland Transport manages many disruptions each day**

- 4.41 Auckland Transport's Day of Operations team has 11 full-time equivalent staff, working in shifts seven days a week. In 2022, the team had only seven full-time equivalent staff to cover the same shifts.
- 4.42 Auckland Transport made this change because of increasing workload. There were frequent public transport disruptions, changes to the operating model for ferries and rail, the return of cruise ships, and a need to provide back-ups for staff during breaks or on annual or sick leave.
- 4.43 Day of Operations and Auckland Information staff manage between 67 and 144 public transport disruptions each day. Most of these disruptions are planned. However, Auckland Transport told us that this number can fluctuate daily or seasonally. Although the number of disruptions that Auckland Transport manages represents a small percentage of about 13,500 public transport services made each day, they can have a significant impact on people, particularly when they are unplanned.
- 4.44 The number of disruptions each day and the reliance on manual systems mean that Auckland Transport does not identify and communicate all unplanned disruptions in a timely way.
- 4.45 Documents provided to us indicate that, on average, it takes Auckland Transport 22 minutes to issue its first public communications about an unplanned disruption after an incident occurs. Auckland Transport wants to improve this time.
- 4.46 Our review of the Day of Operations team's incident reporting from 2021 to 2024 shows that Auckland Transport's processes and systems for communicating unplanned disruptions can quickly be overwhelmed when a major disruption affects multiple services.
- 4.47 For example, in August 2023, when a gas leak in downtown Auckland disrupted multiple bus services, incident reporting noted significant customer impact and delayed communications because of the time it took staff to manually enter detours and redirections for each affected bus.
- 4.48 Auckland Transport does not communicate about some major disruptions at all. We saw many examples in Auckland Transport's incident reporting of significant disruptions where no public communications were issued. Where reasons were provided for this, they included that the disruption occurred outside of shift hours or that Auckland Transport was not notified of the disruption in a timely way.

### **Auckland Transport relies on the timeliness and accuracy of information it receives from others**

- 4.49 Along with its manual systems, Auckland Transport relies on others, such as operators or other parties in the transport system, to provide information about disruptions. Its ability to communicate effectively depends on the accuracy and timeliness of the information it receives.
- 4.50 Auckland Transport expects its operators to immediately advise it of any disruptions to services. However, we saw examples in the Day of Operations team's incident reporting of operators failing to notify Auckland Transport of major disruptions in a timely way. We also saw examples where Auckland Transport could not contact operators.
- 4.51 For example, in June 2023, a bus operator took three hours to notify the Day of Operations team that it had cancelled all services on a particular route for the remainder of the day because of weather conditions.
- 4.52 Unnotified roadworks can cause significant disruptions to public transport services. Auckland Transport has processes for managing the effects of roadworks on public transport. For example, contractors are required to notify and gain pre-approval of planned works at least five days before starting work. Auckland Transport staff can require contractors to make changes to minimise the works' impact on public transport.
- 4.53 However, Auckland Transport acknowledges that it often lacks reliable or timely information about roadworks affecting bus services. As a result, it communicates only a small percentage of these disruptions.
- 4.54 We heard that contractors do not always submit applications for proposed works within the required time frames. Auckland Transport is often unaware whether the planned works it approves are done within the approved time frame, and it has limited ability to penalise contractors who repeatedly breach conditions.
- 4.55 We discuss some of the measures that Auckland Transport is taking to better identify and enforce compliance issues by road contractors in paragraph 4.75.



## Prioritisation is inconsistent

- 4.56 Auckland Transport uses a matrix to assess the severity and impact of incidents affecting public transport. However, we reviewed incident reporting from 2021 to 2024 and saw that staff did not interpret this matrix consistently. Subsequent actions were also not consistently based on the incident's assessed severity.
- 4.57 For example, some car accidents were coded as "high severity" even though they did not affect public transport. Auckland Transport rated the cancellation of more than 700 bus services in July 2023 because of driver shortages as "medium severity" despite the large number of people affected.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.58 Other examples include the suspension of train services until further notice in mid-2024 due to infrastructure issues and industrial action being coded as "low severity", and ferry cancellations and delays due to disruptions from cruise ships also being mostly coded as "low severity".
- 4.59 We expected the severity of an incident (based on its likely impacts on people) to determine how and when Auckland Transport communicates disruptions to the public. However, the data we looked at did not show a clear relationship between the likely impacts of an incident, its assigned severity rating, and how it was communicated.
- 4.60 Auckland Transport acknowledges that its severity matrix is not fit for purpose. Staff told us that this is because it was developed for the roading system, not for public transport.
- 4.61 Auckland Transport told us that it intends to develop a new severity matrix for public transport.

## There are no protocols for managing disruptions to school bus services

- 4.62 Auckland Transport is responsible for managing the contracts for most school bus services in Auckland. It is reasonable for parents and caregivers whose children use school bus services to expect Auckland Transport to have a clear protocol for responding when those services are disrupted.
- 4.63 Auckland Transport's incident reporting from 2021 to 2024 includes multiple instances of children being stranded because school bus services did not arrive at the expected start time or did not depart the first stop. Caregivers and parents were unable to confirm their child's whereabouts because bus operators did not communicate about the disruptions in a timely manner.

<sup>9</sup> Auckland Transport told us that the cancellations were part of a planned reduction due to bus driver shortages and customers were notified.

- 4.64 Auckland Transport told us that it attempts to avoid disruptions to school bus services wherever possible, including by prioritising them over other services. However, it has no documented protocol on how to respond when disruptions affect school bus services. We were told that operators will contact the school, but this appears to be based on previous undocumented practice rather than an agreed procedure.

**Processes for debriefing after major disruptions and incidents need formalising**

- 4.65 A weekly joint performance committee meeting between Auckland Transport and Auckland One Rail reviews data about some past disruptions.
- 4.66 Although we saw evidence of reviews into some past disruptions, Auckland Transport does not have clear criteria – such as the type or severity rating of an incident or disruption – to determine if a review will be carried out.
- 4.67 As we explained in our 2023 report *Auckland Council: Preparedness for responding to an emergency*, robustly reviewing responses to major incidents is essential to learn from past responses and inform ongoing improvements.

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**Recommendation 2**

We recommend that Auckland Transport develop criteria to determine when it will review its responses to disruptions, and define how it will use what it learns from those reviews to inform ongoing improvements.

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## Work is under way to improve how disruptions are managed

- 4.68 Auckland Transport is aware that it needs to improve its processes for managing and informing the public about disruptions.
- 4.69 Improving the management and communication of planned and unplanned disruptions is a strategic priority for Auckland Transport under the Public Transport Plan. Managing disruptions is also a key part of the “Improving network productivity” priority in Auckland Transport’s statement of intent.
- 4.70 In early 2024, Auckland Transport launched a work programme that brings together a range of existing initiatives to improve how the organisation manages and communicates disruptions.
- 4.71 The work programme includes a project to identify all existing initiatives that contribute to reducing disruptions. We were told that the programme will also include work to describe the system’s ideal “future state” and the technology that Auckland Transport will need to support this shift.
- 4.72 Auckland Transport commissioned research to better understand how people experience disruptions and what they think is most important in communicating disruptions. It has already made changes based on this work.
- 4.73 Auckland Transport’s research indicated that people want to be informed as soon as a disruption occurs and that they rate timeliness over, for example, receiving full information about an incident.
- 4.74 In response, Auckland Transport introduced “holding messages” that provide early notice to people when services are disrupted. We view this as a positive sign that Auckland Transport is listening. However, Auckland Transport recognises they need to do more than this to improve its performance in managing and communicating disruptions.
- 4.75 In October 2023, Auckland Transport began a two-year work programme to reduce the frequency of unplanned disruptions caused by roadworks. This includes revising the process for approving and managing roadworks. Auckland Transport told us it plans to use CCTV to monitor high-priority work sites for compliance.
- 4.76 Auckland Transport has set up a governance group of senior managers for the disruptions programme. This group receives regular progress updates. However, this work is still in its early stages. At the time of our audit, Auckland Transport was still to carry out more detailed planning to establish the programme’s time frames, milestones, and resources.

- 4.77 Many of the initiatives that form part of the disruptions programme are not new. A range of activities have been under way for some time. We support Auckland Transport formalising the activities into a programme because this should assist with the governance and management of the work, identify and remove duplication, better manage dependencies, and maximise benefits.
- 4.78 In our view, it is important that Auckland Transport set clear objectives for the work programme and can demonstrate how initiatives contribute to them. This will help to focus resources and efforts in the areas that make the most difference.

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**Recommendation 3**

We recommend that Auckland Transport improve processes for managing unplanned disruptions to services, including for school bus services, and consider ways to better inform the public about unplanned disruptions.

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# Auckland Transport could better understand its passengers' experiences

## 5

- 5.1 Performance reporting is the main way that public organisations explain how well they have used public money to deliver services and achieve outcomes.
- 5.2 Analysing performance information can help organisations and stakeholders deepen their understanding of how well services are being delivered and what progress is being made towards goals.
- 5.3 We expected Auckland Transport to have enough information to understand and monitor people's perceptions, expectations, and experiences of safety. We expected to see that Auckland Transport regularly analyses this information to identify where it can make improvements and that it acts on that information where appropriate.
- 5.4 Although Auckland Transport collects a significant amount of timeliness and location information about its bus, train, and ferry services, it does not report this information in a way that corresponds with how people use these services.
- 5.5 Although Auckland Transport collects a range of information about personal safety incidents, that information is not routinely brought together for analysis. In our view, this is important to ensure that Auckland Transport has a clear understanding of how it is making public transport services safe. Auckland Transport is aware of these issues and has made recent improvements to build its data and insights capability.

### **Auckland Transport measures punctuality and reliability**

- 5.6 Auckland Transport commissions external research and surveys people about their public transport experiences, including through an on-board customer satisfaction survey. Some of the surveys include questions about reliability, punctuality, and safety.
- 5.7 In addition, Auckland Transport can track the movement of buses, trains, and ferries in real time, including their arrival and departure from stops, stations, and wharves. Automatic Vehicle Location devices attached to buses collect data and transmit it to Auckland Transport's Command Centre system.
- 5.8 Train data is reported through the COMPASS performance software maintained by Auckland One Rail. Auckland Transport can monitor the time each train service takes, compare the service to the schedule, and analyse schedule variances.
- 5.9 Auckland Transport uses GPS information from Automatic Identification System Transponders on each ferry, which is also transmitted to Command Centre. We were told that Auckland Transport tracks all ferries in real time, but the data is not always accurate.

- 5.10 Tracking can be inaccurate because skippers bypass a wharf if no-one is waiting, operators can misallocate a vessel to a route, and vessels pass through other wharf GPS locations on the way to berth. Auckland Transport told us it is working to improve the accuracy of the data.
- 5.11 Auckland Transport uses the tracking information it collects to measure services’ reliability and punctuality for all types of public transport. Figure 2 sets out Auckland Transport’s definitions of reliable and punctual services.

**Figure 2**  
**Auckland Transport’s reliability and punctuality measure definitions for all services**

Measure	Definition
Reliable	A service that operates and leaves within -.59 to +9.59 minutes of schedule
Punctual	A service that both leaves its first stop between -0.59 minutes and +4.59 minutes of the scheduled start time and arrives at the final stop no later than +4.59 minutes of the scheduled arrival time

**Auckland Transport has made improvements to its performance measures**

- 5.12 Our 2024 guidance *Local government planning and reporting on performance* explains that, when defining measures, people should consider:
  - the aspects of service and performance that are most important to the community;
  - whether the measures are relevant, understandable, and verifiable;
  - whether the measures and targets will enable readers to assess the effectiveness of a council’s main policy and investment decisions;
  - whether the measures and targets reflect the financial significance of the activity; and
  - the most important dimensions of performance in delivering services, such as quantity, responsiveness, quality, reliability, timeliness, and accessibility.
- 5.13 Auckland Transport has improved its performance measures over time. For example, until 2022/23, Auckland Transport measured punctuality at only the first stop. In 2022/23, Auckland Transport revised the measure to include the last stop to provide a better picture of punctuality for the whole trip.
- 5.14 In 2023/24, Auckland Transport introduced a reliability measure that considers services that were cancelled or did not start their route within a reasonable time (see Figure 2).

- 5.15 Auckland Transport staff told us that it has increased the performance reporting team's resourcing and is focused on ensuring that its measures are meaningful and that its definitions for punctuality and reliability are widely understood.
- 5.16 Planned improvements include new measures to assess the timeliness of communications during service disruptions. Currently, when disruptions are communicated, Auckland Transport takes about 22 minutes to inform the public about a disruption. It wants to improve this to an average of 10 minutes. It is also considering measuring the time people lose on a trip because of a disruption.
- 5.17 These improvements are promising because they are more focused on people's experiences, but we think there are further opportunities for improvement.

### **There are opportunities for performance information to better reflect passengers' experiences**

- 5.18 Auckland Transport publicly reports its performance at a high level. For example, its 2023/24 annual report set out the results for reliability and punctuality measures for buses, ferries, and trains combined as 12-month rolling averages, weighted by patronage.
- 5.19 The reliability measure is new, and the punctuality measure has been revised, so information is not able to be presented over time and there is no way for a reader to understand whether performance has improved or declined compared with previous years.
- 5.20 The combined result gives an overall impression that public transport in Auckland is reliable and punctual. For example, for 2023/24, 94% of services were reported as reliable and 88% as punctual. This is accurate according to the definitions that Auckland Transport uses for these measures (see Figure 2).
- 5.21 However, in our view, these measures could more accurately reflect the way people typically use services. For example, people might not use public transport from the first stop of a route to the last. A measure that looked at or factored in the punctuality of services at interim stops might better align with a passenger's actual experience.
- 5.22 Monitoring information in this way could also lead to better performance analysis and, if Auckland Transport used it to make improvements, better outcomes for Aucklanders.
- 5.23 Auckland Transport told us that it is moving towards a "turn up and go" network on key bus (and some train) routes where people do not need to consider the timetable. In that context, it told us that adherence to schedule is not a good way

to measure performance because its rapid and frequent networks have high-frequency services (which means that although any one bus or train might not be punctual, the frequency arriving minimises the impact).

- 5.24 For example, Auckland's link bus services do not run to a timetable. Auckland Transport's website says that these can be expected at stops every seven to 15 minutes (although actual frequency might vary), depending on the specific service.
- 5.25 This makes sense. However, there are still routes that are not part of the frequent network corridor or do not yet have high-frequency services in place. In these circumstances, timetables are the practical commitment Auckland Transport currently makes about when people can expect public transport services to arrive. In our view, they should be as accurate as possible, and public transport should run to these times as much as practicable.
- 5.26 Auckland Transport told us that it plans to improve its reporting and intends to report reliability by type of transport in its 2024/25 annual report.

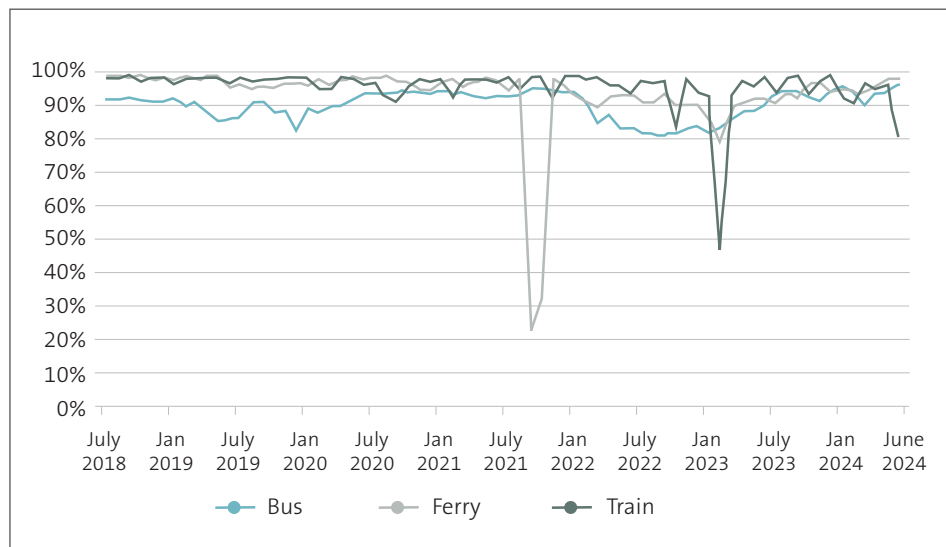
### **Analysing long-term trends is important to understanding performance over time**

- 5.27 We analysed information that Auckland Transport provided to us to understand the reliability of scheduled trips for services that actually ran (that is, were not cancelled) between 2018 and 2024.<sup>10</sup>
- 5.28 Figure 3 shows how reliable each type of transport was according to Auckland Transport's definition (see Figure 2) from 2018 to 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Auckland Transport did not report reliability information until 2023/24. For our analysis, we sourced punctuality and reliability information from 2018-2022 so that we could understand any longer term trends in the data.

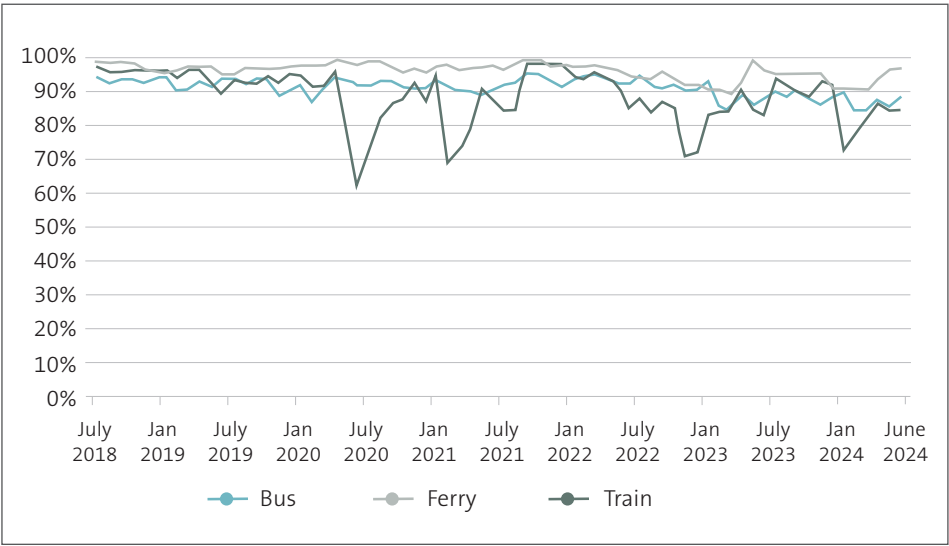


**Figure 3**  
Auckland Transport's monthly reliability scores, July 2018 to June 2024



- 5.29 Information that Auckland Transport publicly reports indicates a 94% reliability score for buses, trains, and ferries for 2023/24. Our analysis shows the reliability for each type of transport over six years. In our view, showing long-term performance information better allows people to compare their perceptions of performance and provides transparency of whether performance has improved over time.
- 5.30 Figure 3 shows that bus reliability was best in late 2021, dropped during 2022 and 2023, and returned to 2021 levels in 2024. Ferry reliability was best in late 2018 and worst during September and October 2021. Train reliability has been decreasing slightly over time since 2018 but was at its worst in February 2023.
- 5.31 We also analysed the data to see whether the services that ran between 2018 and 2024 were punctual. Figure 4 shows how punctual each type of transport was according to Auckland Transport's definition (see Figure 2) from 2018 to 2024.

**Figure 4**  
Auckland Transport’s monthly punctuality scores, July 2018 to June 2024

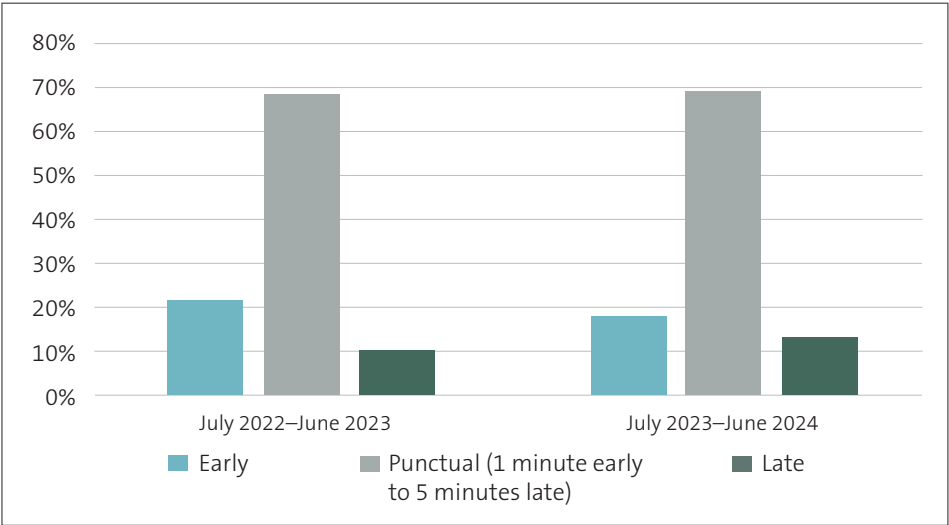


- 5.32     Figure 4 shows that punctuality decreased slightly between 2018 and 2024 for all types of transport.
- 5.33     Our analysis shows bus punctuality was best in early 2022 and declined during 2022 and 2023. Ferry punctuality was best between 2020 and 2022, but its performance has decreased since late 2022. Train punctuality is more volatile than bus and ferry punctuality. It has decreased since 2018 and early 2019, except for late 2021/early 2022.
- 5.34     In our view, it is important that Auckland Transport monitors the long-term trend so it can understand whether its planned initiatives are making a difference.
- 5.35     Auckland Transport publicly reports punctuality only as a combined score for train, bus, and ferry services. In our view, there is value in disaggregating Auckland Transport’s high-level performance information to allow people to understand the performance of the type of transport that they use.

Measures should reflect the way passengers use services

- 5.36 We also analysed all bus trips from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024 to understand how well buses adhered to their entire schedules (rather than just the first stop and the last stop). This is because passengers might not travel from the first stop to the last.
- 5.37 Figure 5 shows the percentage of stops for all bus routes that met punctuality targets and whether the others were early or late.

**Figure 5**  
**Adherence to schedule for all stops for Auckland Transport buses, 2022/23 to 2023/24**



- 5.38 Most buses (about 70%) were punctual. Slightly more than 30% were either early or late to any given stop in both 2022/23 and 2023/24, with more late buses in 2023/24.
- 5.39 We also looked at how buses from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2024 have adhered to schedule (between one minute early and five minutes late according to the timetable) at the first stop, an interim stop, and the last stop. We found that, on average, 10% of trips that were punctual at the first and last stop were not punctual at the stop in between.
- 5.40 Although including the last stop in Auckland Transport's punctuality measure has been an improvement, considering intermediate stops – or middle stops at key interchanges – might better reflect a passenger's experience of bus punctuality.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that Auckland Transport review the information it holds about passenger experience to help inform service improvements and improve performance reporting (to allow the public, Auckland Council, and others to better understand how reliable public transport is in Auckland).

Schedule adherence data shows differences across Auckland

- 5.41
- Auckland is a large city and many people who use public transport only travel to parts of it. We wanted to understand differences in how well buses adhere to their schedules in different areas of Auckland. We did not see evidence of Auckland Transport carrying out this kind of analysis.
- 5.42
- Figure 6 shows the percentage of buses that met punctuality targets and how early or late others were in different areas of Auckland.

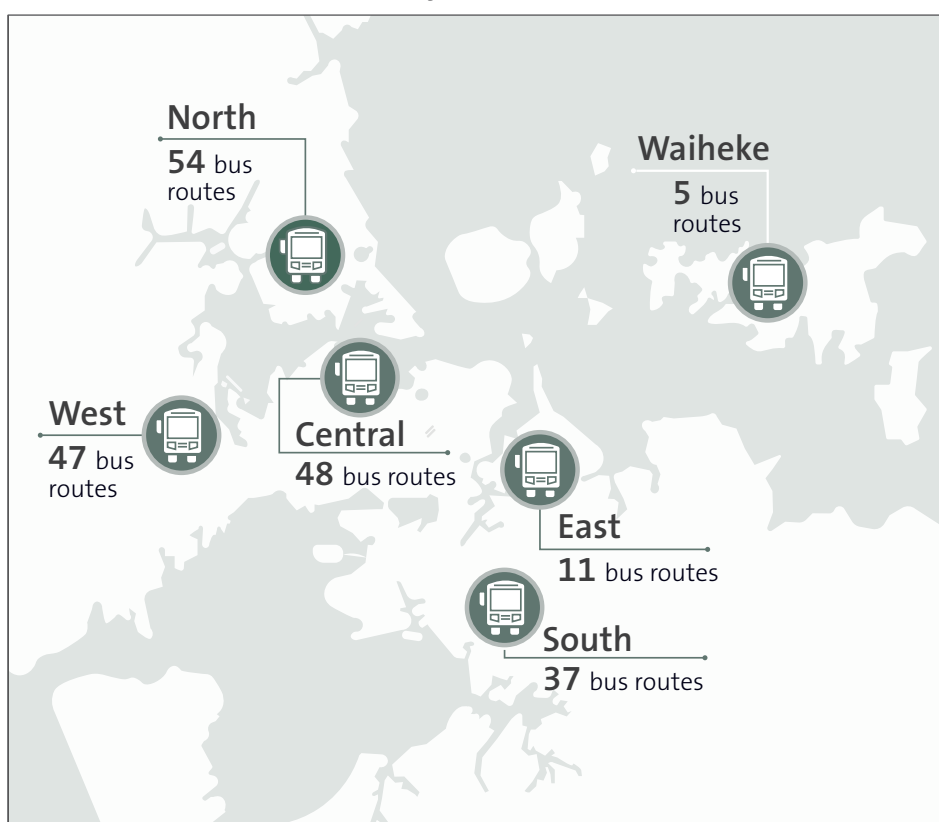
Figure 6  
Adherence to schedule for all stops for Auckland Transport buses, 2022/23 to 2023/24, by area

Area	Buses more than 5 mins early	Buses 1 to 5 mins early	Buses 1 min early to 5 mins late (Punctual)	Buses 5 to 10 mins late	Buses more than 10 mins late
Central	6.1%	17.4%	62.9%	13.4%	0.0%
East	3.7%	19.1%	68.7%	8.4%	0.0%
North	2.2%	12.8%	76.3%	8.5%	0.0%
South	3.3%	13.7%	70.7%	12.2%	0.0%
Waiheke	0.1%	4.6%	79.8%	15.3%	0.1%
West	5.4%	14.4%	66.8%	13.3%	0.0%

- 5.43
- Figure 6 shows that buses on routes in central Auckland were the least likely to remain on their schedule. Buses on Waiheke Island were the most likely to remain on their schedule. However, buses on Waiheke Island that did not remain on their schedule were most likely to be the latest.
- 5.44
- Some of the results from our analysis are unsurprising. For example, traffic congestion is likely to be higher in central Auckland than other areas at certain times, and this can affect bus punctuality.

- 5.45 In our view, making information available by route or area would allow people to better understand the performance of services they use.

**Figure 7**  
Number of bus routes in Auckland, by area



### There are opportunities to better understand personal safety

- 5.46 As we describe in paragraph 3.34, personal safety is about people feeling able to use public transport without threat, fear, or harm. To understand how safe passengers are when they use public transport in Auckland, and how safe they feel, Auckland Transport needs to collect information about personal safety. It also needs to understand any shifts or trends in that information.
- 5.47 Auckland Transport collects information about personal safety from a range of sources. The customer satisfaction monitor run by its Customer Insights team asks respondents about how safe they feel on public transport.

- 5.48 In Auckland Transport's Brand and Reputation Tracker (an externally run survey that asks Aucklanders about their perceptions of Auckland Transport and its work), respondents are asked about their perception of safety and whether this has changed, if they feel worried using public transport, and whether safety concerns affect how they use public transport. Auckland Transport also carries out a quantitative survey of passengers to test attitudes towards solutions to help people feel safer on public transport.
- 5.49 Other key sources of information include incident reporting and end-of-shift reports from Transport Officers, operator staff, and security. People can also make complaints about personal safety matters to Auckland Transport.
- 5.50 Auckland Transport collates complaints in a customer relationship management database. Auckland Transport's health and safety system, Synergi, and its incident recording system, RiskShield, also contain information about personal safety incidents.
- 5.51 A survey that Auckland Transport ran between July 2022 and June 2024 indicated that people generally felt safe waiting for or travelling on a service.
- 5.52 At the same time, information from the Brand and Reputation Tracker indicates that concerns about safety when using public transport are increasing and influence when people will use it (for instance, they might not use it at night or when travelling in certain areas).
- 5.53 Personal and public safety is also a focus for local boards and they have asked Auckland Transport to prioritise it. Their suggestions to Auckland Transport include increasing the number of CCTV cameras on buses and at stations, and increasing the number of Transport Officers on buses.
- 5.54 We consider that Auckland Transport could improve its data collection and analysis to gain more insights into personal safety.
- 5.55 Because data is collected from various sources, comes from various parties, and is in different formats, it is not easy to bring together to provide an accurate overall picture of personal safety on public transport. We were unable to easily access information about how many personal safety incidents have happened on public transport services, what type of incidents they were, or what type of transport they happened on. Trend information for personal safety is not readily available.
- 5.56 Most of the information we did see was health and safety reporting or operator reporting of personal safety incidents involving operator staff, drivers, and crew. Violence, threats, and aggression were the health and safety risks that employees and contractors reported the most. They made up 81% (266 of 330) of total

reported events from August 2023 to July 2024 in the health and safety data we were provided.

- 5.57 Auckland Transport uses an Enterprise Data Warehouse to store data, including reliability, punctuality, and patronage information. Auckland Transport has plans to integrate Crimestoppers (a tool for passengers to report crime, fare evasion, and anti-social behaviour) into the AT Mobile app and link it to its Enterprise Data Warehouse.
- 5.58 This is positive. It is likely to help Auckland Transport gain more insights into personal safety matters and better categorise incidents. However, in our view Auckland Transport still has more work to do to better integrate other sources of information to generate insights in this area.

### **Auckland Transport has increased its data capability**

- 5.59 We have seen evidence that Auckland Transport is improving its data and insights to enable more effective interventions. For example, Auckland Transport's Public Transport Advisory Group is made up of representatives from disability advocacy groups. Based on feedback from this group, Auckland Transport has introduced alerts on the AT Mobile app to let users know when station lifts are not working, and is developing a website that will show the status of lifts at all stations.
- 5.60 Auckland Transport has also strengthened its reliability and punctuality expectations in its contracts with operators in line with improvements in its ability to track their services, most recently with ferries. As discussed in Part 2, the monthly operational performance report helps Auckland Transport understand its operators' performance.
- 5.61 In our view, the better Auckland Transport's data and information is, the more effective its interventions will be.
- 5.62 In December 2023, Auckland Transport set up an insights-focused data team in the Public Transport and Active Modes directorate. The team now regularly reports on the performance of public transport services.
- 5.63 We were told that the team has a specific remit to understand what Auckland Transport could do to improve public transport's reliability. We understand the team has developed a framework to transform raw data into insights and enable data-driven decision-making, communication, and strategic planning. The data team also produces the monthly operational performance report.

### **A Customer Insights team gathers and analyses public feedback**

- 5.64 Auckland Transport's Customer Insights team is responsible for bringing the public's voice into Auckland Transport. Previously it was its own division. It now reports to the Customer and Network Performance directorate. We were told this change was made to encourage the rest of Auckland Transport to better consider passengers' experiences in their work.
- 5.65 The Customer Insights team collates information from various sources to understand people's expectations of Auckland Transport. The team runs satisfaction surveys, develops case studies, gives input into business cases for improvement projects, and examines customer-related issues in Auckland Transport's work.
- 5.67 We were told that although the Customer Insights team has always worked closely with the Public Transport and Active Modes directorate, they are still establishing how they will work together with the new insights-focused data team.
- 5.68 In our view, the work of both these teams is important for Auckland Transport to gain a full understanding of overall performance. Although Auckland Transport has met its reliability and punctuality targets in 2023/24, it did not meet its customer perceptions targets. The Customer Insights team carried out research that indicates that Aucklanders would like public transport to be fast, frequent, and reliable, but some do not perceive that it is.
- 5.69 Auckland Transport needs to bring these aspects of performance together to understand the changes it needs to make to its public transport services and why.



# Performance reporting could be improved

- 6.1 Auckland Transport is a substantive council-controlled organisation.<sup>11</sup> As such, it must:
- prepare and adopt a statement of intent to state publicly its activities and intentions for the year and the objectives that it will contribute to;
  - provide an opportunity for Auckland Council to influence the organisation's direction; and
  - provide a basis for its accountability to Auckland Council.
- 6.2 We expected Auckland Transport to inform the public about how reliable its services are. We also expected Auckland Transport to report its reliability performance to Auckland Council.
- 6.3 Auckland Transport's performance information is reported in its statement of intent, annual report, and quarterly reports to the Council's Transport, Resilience and Infrastructure Committee. However, the more detailed information about passenger numbers, punctuality, and reliability that Auckland Transport reports does not include information about all types of transport.
- 6.4 In our view, there are opportunities for Auckland Transport to provide further insights that would enhance its reporting to Auckland Council and the public.

## Information for Auckland Council and the public could be more detailed

- 6.5 In our 2015 report *Governance and accountability of council-controlled organisations*, we explained that, although there is no single model for monitoring council-controlled organisations, a good monitoring system will have certain features. These include:
- agreement on the statement of intent;
  - regular reporting by the council-controlled organisation (at least quarterly) on progress against the objectives in the statement of intent; and
  - a good relationship between the local authority and the council-controlled organisation, at both governance level and officer level, which enables issues to be dealt with early.
- 6.6 Auckland Transport must report on its operations quarterly. It must also prepare an annual report within three months of the end of each financial year.

11 Substantive council-controlled organisations are wholly owned Auckland Council entities that are responsible for delivering a significant service or activity on behalf of Auckland Council or that own or manage assets with a value of more than \$10 million. A substantive council-controlled organisation is a concept in only Auckland's local government arrangements.

- 6.7 Auckland Council's Transport, Resilience and Infrastructure Committee provides oversight of Auckland Transport. Auckland Transport's Chief Executive updates the Committee on strategic issues, operational matters, and key performance measures each month.
- 6.8 Auckland Transport also provides updates and reports on specific projects to Auckland's 21 local boards. The local boards are responsible for local-level governance at Auckland Council through decision-making on local matters. They also contribute to regional strategies, plans, policies, and decisions.
- 6.9 We saw some examples of Auckland Transport providing Auckland Council with progress updates and some performance information, including about passenger numbers.
- 6.10 However, we saw a mismatch in expectations between Auckland Council and Auckland Transport about the level of information that Auckland Transport should routinely provide.
- 6.11 Staff at the Council told us that they would like more detailed information than they currently receive in the statement of intent and annual reporting. Those staff told us this was needed to inform quality advice. We also heard this affects the ability of elected members to communicate effectively with the public and stakeholders because they cannot provide any more information than what Auckland Transport has already reported.
- 6.12 Auckland Transport told us that it supplies detailed information to the Council and elected members, and that it has recently improved the advice and information that it reports to the Council, particularly to the Transport, Resilience and Infrastructure Committee.
- 6.13 As discussed in Part 5, we consider that Auckland Transport could produce more meaningful insights that better reflect passenger experience. These insights might also help to align expectations between Auckland Transport and the Council. In our view, Auckland Transport and the Council need to work together to agree what information is appropriate to support Auckland Council to effectively carry out its governance role.

## Performance information should be more accessible to the public

- 6.14 Feedback on the Public Transport Plan expressed dissatisfaction with public transport, including because of delays and disruptions. The feedback said that many Aucklanders felt that Auckland Transport was not listening to them and what they wanted. In a December 2024 survey, only 33% of respondents felt that Auckland Transport listened and responded to them.
- 6.15 There is considerable public interest in how well Auckland Transport provides public transport. However, to understand how well Auckland Transport is performing, people must look at its statement of intent, annual report, and updates to the Transport, Resilience, and Infrastructure Committee on Auckland Transport's or the Council's websites. Much of this information is at a high level and not available by type of service.
- 6.16 It is important that performance information about public transport reliability is available and accessible to the public. Effective performance reporting that clearly explains what is being delivered and the difference that is being made for New Zealanders helps to maintain trust in public organisations. We encourage Auckland Transport to better inform the public about its performance, including by providing improved insights that are not only more detailed than the information it currently provides but also more easily accessible.
- 6.17 Auckland Transport provides patronage information for bus, rail, and ferry services on its website. This includes a daily patronage spreadsheet and monthly patronage data backdated to July 2005. Auckland Transport's board reports include monthly patronage reports that provide a trend analysis, forecasts, and targets.
- 6.18 Auckland Transport also provides bus performance reports on the same webpage. These are spreadsheets that contain monthly performance information about boardings, boardings for each service hour, punctuality, and reliability for each bus route in Auckland. The report also provides information about route changes. Information is available from 2019 onwards.
- 6.19 This performance information is valuable because it allows the public to understand how bus services are performing at a more detailed level than in Auckland Transport's accountability documents. However, there is a lot of information, it is not in an ideal format, and to understand performance the public would need to analyse it themselves. Auckland Transport does not provide equivalent performance information for ferries and trains.

- 6.20 We see significant opportunities to improve the accessibility of this information, such as by providing insights in a customisable format where someone can easily find information about the routes they take.
- 6.21 Auckland Transport staff told us that work to improve this public performance reporting is under way, and we have seen some early work. The draft reports appear to be an improvement on what the website currently provides.
- 6.22 These reports would allow people to filter information about patronage, reliability, and punctuality by date, type of transport (including ferry and rail), and specific route. We also saw graphs showing trends in the year and month to date.
- 6.23 This is an encouraging development. Auckland Transport told us that this work is expected to go live by September 2025.

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**Recommendation 5**

We recommend that Auckland Transport increase the accessibility of information available to the public about how Auckland's public transport services are performing.

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