



The recent announcement of more trains to cover the busy morning and evening demand is welcome, but where are the trains from Pukekohe Station during the weekends and why does the Auckland region struggle to fund public transport, leaving Pukekohe as an after-thought, while most of Wellington's funding comes from Central Government? Wellington has no need of magic pumpkins, or of a regional fuel tax. Up to 85% of its public transport is paid for by Central Government.

"This is a really long story of Central Government still not knowing why public transport in Auckland is so far behind Wellington. It comes back to inequity again and Auckland being treated differently to all other regions in NZ," Dianne says. "It's been an absolute battle since 1998 to get good quality public transport," says Dianne. "Though the regional council didn't own or control the rail system, in the late 90s it initiated track, station and service improvements. The Government stepped up to the plate and started a \$600 million upgrade of tracks and signalling. The regional council has been upgrading stations and adding refurbished trains to complement the network."

The trains mentioned – still in service today – were lying in a sidings yard in Petone, brought out from England in a terrible state with rusted out bases, basically, falling to pieces. Their condition was so bad, they had to be rebuilt to run the line to Pukekohe, taking their place beside the former pride of the line – the Silver Ferns. It was a red letter day when a train was first brought out from Papakura, collecting 22 commuters at Pukekohe. Gradually, as the first train filled up, more were brought in. Commuters flocked to rail region-wide, with passenger numbers in the Auckland district growing from 2.5 million four years ago to almost 7 million.

"For several years the biggest issue in the Auckland region has been road congestion and the lack of good reliable public transport. The second is air quality – affected by traffic congestion and poorly tuned vehicles. People who argue against paying ARC rates to extend the train services – because they don't use trains – still benefit because other people do, taking vehicles from the roads and reducing congestion.

"Auckland region needs rapid and reliable rail and an electric train fleet – the most recent estimate to replace the diesel trains is \$360 million. We expect rail to be moving more than 30 million passengers a year. It's inconceivable to consider holding an event like the Rugby World Cup here in 2011 without it. We are determined to electrify," Dianne says.



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