

Buses

Social and Physical Infrastructures

The design and social impact of public buses in New Zealand has changed dramatically since the 1870's. We have gone from clumsy coaches pulled by horses to much larger, comfortable and more efficient buses. This essay identifies and discusses some of the significant changes that have occurred in public bus transport in New Zealand since the 1870's. Social implications of these changes are outlined as the essay reveals the important role that bus transport has played in New Zealand history.

Many of us take our personal mobility for granted and neglect to recognise that public bus transport services play a part in the evolving growth and shape of our increasingly urban lifestyles. This essay will briefly describe New Zealand in the 1870's and the nature and role of buses at this time. It will then travel on to describe the place of public bus transport in our lives in 2009. The essay concludes with a reflection on the physical infrastructures needed for our evolving bus transport system and a comment on possible social implications.

By the 1870's over 65 percent of Aotearoa was in Pakeha hands (Barber, 1989). The 1870's also saw the arrival of many new migrants lured from overseas by New Zealand's rich mining potential. An economic recession followed the exhaustion of the South Island's goldfields. Attempts were made by the colonial treasurer of the time, Julius Vogel, to "prime the pumps" (Barber, 1989, p.60) of the failing economy by fostering immigration and promoting public works. Railway construction provided employment for the temporarily jobless, and manufacturing and exports also grew (Hodgson and Ringer, 2002). Public transport and, in particular, public bus transport was typically "horse buses" (McCrystal, 2007, p.14) and described as being "only for those whose need was great or whose constitution strong enough to endure the discomfort and danger it entailed" (McCrystal, 2007, p.16).

Buses in the 1870s were drawn by horse and in the 1870's were overshadowed by an emphasis on the more in vogue rail travel. The horse buses as they were known were limited in their comfort and safety. However, the potential and allure of this new technology was apparent. The first motor vehicles arrived in Wellington in 1898, and William Mclean received the first licence to run a "ten seater motor car" (McCrystal, 2007, p.16) in 1903. This basic bus public transport increased peoples mobility within the centres of Auckland and Wellington, while it was the train network that reached into rural New Zealand. Overall, the buses in 1870's were slow, uncomfortable and unsafe and yet there was a need for them.

Buses in 2009 are larger, more comfortable and much more efficient than their horse-drawn predecessors. They are now built with air conditioning and heating to ensure a comfortable journey. Today's buses are also a lot bigger than those of the 1870s, so they can accommodate more people making them efficient and practical for use. Technology has played a large role in improving bus transport. The pneumatic tyre improved comfort, combustion engines and recently electric engines improved efficiency, and clever designs help our buses 'kneel' so that elderly and disabled can use the systems as well as any one else.

Our recent governments have invested heavily in bus transport and more people than ever before are using the bus networks. Along with the investment in the actual buses is the required investment in roads, bridges, signage, stations, and new technology to ongoingly make buses more efficient, reliable and attractive. Buses in 2009 are regarded as necessary community services that enable independence and mobility of all citizens. NZ is a social democratic society and the bus is a perfect

symbol of what New Zealanders value.

Buses have significantly changed since 1870 and the impact is seen in our larger sprawling urban cities, more communications between settlements (McCrystal, 2007), better access to community services such as schools and hospitals (McCrystal, 2007), better roads for the benefit of all, more mobility for all New Zealanders.

In conclusion, the social and physical infrastructure of buses in New Zealand has changed greatly since the 1870's. The designs of buses have made massive improvements since then and so have their influence on New Zealand society. They've helped us make better cities, foster independency, bolster our economy and serve the people on a day to day basis.

Bibliography

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