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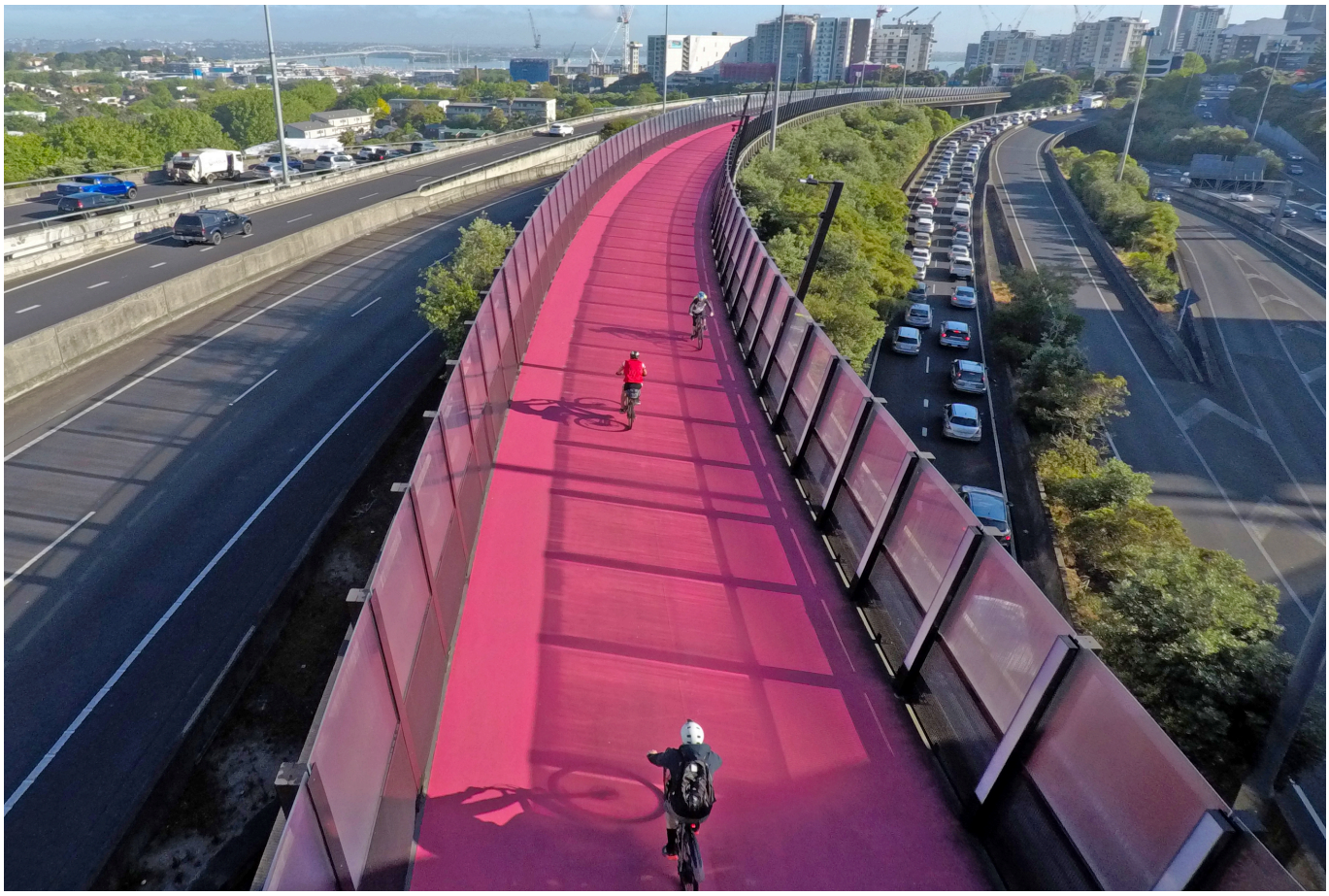

Where do the parties stand? A low carbon, healthy transport system

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Summary

How will the next Government address the challenge of moving to a low carbon healthy transport system? In this Briefing we analyse responses to a short pre-election survey of political parties in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) on the topic of transport policy. Three parties in the current Parliament responded to the survey and, where possible, we gathered information from the other two. The results of asking political parties about their low carbon, healthy and equity-focussed transport policies show that, within the limits of the information provided, all parties fall short when it comes to policies that promote planetary and population health. While some parties have policies that represent a good start at addressing transport harms and promoting healthy, equitable and low carbon transport, other parties are promoting policies that are harmful to population and planetary health and will widen inequity.

The Election 2023 Public Health Survey

In the lead up to the 2023 General Election, the Public Health Communication Centre contacted each of the five major parties with a set of questions about their position on five areas relevant to public health: future risks, tax, water quality, transport, and health equity. In this *Public Health Expert Briefing* series, experts summarise and analyse the parties' responses.

You can read more about the survey in our introductory article, and the articles in the series will be collated here as they are published.

Transport is crucially important for population and planetary health. Through the pathways of injury, air pollution and physical inactivity, the current transport system is responsible for more death and disability each year in Aotearoa than tobacco or obesity and contributes to life expectancy differences between Māori and non-Māori.[1] Lengthening commutes and transport poverty are adding to rising levels of psychological distress in our communities and transport remains the second largest, and fastest rising, source of greenhouse gas emissions at a time when it is urgent we reduce them.[2,3]

Our current transport system is not only unhealthy but inequitable. Parts of the population are excluded from the benefits that transport brings (e.g. access to employment, to healthcare and to whānau connections), suffer disproportionately from the adverse health consequences of the transport system and/or are placed under significant financial strain to pay for essential travel to work, school etc.[1,4-8] Alongside this, some groups of people drive and fly a lot each week, emitting very high levels of transport greenhouse gasses without consequences.[9]

Fortunately, there is a wealth of evidence about what works (and what does not work) to create a transport system that is healthy for people and planet; that enables all of us to flourish while keeping the planet safe for future generations.[10-12] A healthy transport system

involves better designed cities that we can easily and cheaply move around in by walking, cycling and public transport, using cars only when absolutely necessary. We need to re-create our cities and towns so low carbon healthy travel is available to everyone and is the default. We asked the political parties about their policies on low carbon, healthy transport systems.

What we did

We asked all the political parties two specific questions. All five parties responded, but National and Labour did not reply directly to the questions as they had not released their full transport policies. We have taken information from policy published subsequently by the parties. You can read the full party responses in the Appendix.

Policies on transport equity

Our first question to the political parties was: "will your party introduce subsidies for purchasing e-bikes for low-income adults and retain … half price fares for public transport"?

We asked about public transport pricing because public transport use is a key component of a low carbon transport system. Lowering pricing is one of the policies needed to increase use of public transport and is one of the most equitable 'mode-shift' policies.[13-16] We asked about e-bikes because increasingly they are being used as a car replacement in cities.[17,18] E-bikes are a low carbon form of transport with health benefits.[19] A number of jurisdictions now have financial incentive programmes to help people access e-bikes, as they remain financially out of reach for many.

The table below outlines the responses. In brief, only the Green Party had a specific policy around increasing access to e-bikes, although Te Pāti Māori had a policy to increase safe cycling infrastructure. Labour made free public transport permanent for children and half price for young people up to 25 and for Community Services Card holders in Budget 2023. The Green Party and Te Pāti Māori support this policy and would expand it. ACT does not support this policy.
(Responses are in randomised order.)

Political party	Summary of response – e-bikes access support	Summary of response – half price public transport
Te Pāti Māori	No specific policies to increase access to e-bikes, but Te Pāti Māori will prioritise safe cycling and walking paths and corridors.	Free public transport for children, students, and Community Services Card holders immediately, and for everyone within five years.
National*	No e-bike policy mentioned.	No policy on half-price public transport or public transport pricing mentioned.
ACT	No e-bike policy	No public transport policy
Green Party	Will increase access through community hire schemes based in marae, community centres and educational institutes, and through targeted subsidies.	Free fares for tertiary students and apprentices, Community Services Card holders, everyone under 18, and all Total Mobility card holders.

Political party	Summary of response – e-bikes access support	Summary of response – half price public transport
Labour[#]	No e-bike policy mentioned to date	Budget 2023 included permanent free public transport for under 13 and half price for those under 25 or those who have a Community Services or Total Mobility card.

**Not answered directly, taken from here; [#] taken from here*

Policies on sustainable and healthy transport

Our second question to the political parties asked: "what policies will your party adopt to shift NZ to more sustainable and health promoting transport"?

We asked this because transforming the transport system is a long-term (30-50 year) project, that will require us to deploy the full range of legal, financial, infrastructure and encouragement tools at our disposal.[13,14] We wanted to give parties an opportunity to tell us about how they would do that.

The table below outlines the responses. In brief, the responses reflect diverse priorities. The only policy ACT discussed was using the Emissions Trading Scheme to price a transition to electric cars. Te Pāti Māori is focused on improved rural and regional transport through increased access to electric cars. National is focused on physical infrastructure, with plans to expand and re-build the roading network and retain some currently planned public transport projects in Auckland and Wellington. The Green Party has a collection of policies aiming at increasing public and active transport in cities and nationally (both passenger and freight). Labour has announced a 'flagship' $45 billion plan to build two new roading tunnels and a new light rail tunnel across the Waitemata Harbour. The draft Government Policy Statement (GPS) 2024 on land transport, just released by Labour, outlines their broader plans for the transport sector. These include a range of roading and public transport infrastructure improvements, including a more coherent approach to mass rapid transit projects. There are multiple references to reducing emissions and vehicle kilometres travelled but it is unclear whether all the policies and activity class funding allocations are entirely consistent with achieving this.

Political party	Summary of response
Te Pāti Māori	Focused on transport in regional and rural areas – specifically bringing down the cost of low emissions vehicles and electric vehicle infrastructure and implementing cheap and accessible public transport for people who live in these locations.
National*	Policy focused on new road building and roading infrastructure maintenance and improvement. Public transport infrastructure projects in Wellington (rail improvements) and Auckland (2 busways and a rapid transit project) are also planned. The argument is that better roads will promote faster and easier movement of electric cars and this transition will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve climate targets.

Political party	Summary of response
ACT	Will rely on the ETS (with a cap on emissions) to create price signals to purchase electric cars as the mechanism to reduce transport emissions.
Green Party	In addition to the policies outlined in answer 1, the Green Party will create public transport networks in all cities, nationwide rapid rail for passengers and freight, change the operating model for public transport, create safe walking and cycling routes for every school through lower speed limits and crossings and implement a 'build back better' policy (where road maintenance is used as an opportunity to improve active and public transport in the location).
Labour[#]	Physical infrastructure investment in Auckland through light rail and bus improvements and road building. Some reallocation of space to active transport once these construction projects are complete. The draft GPS 2024 outlines a range of road and public transport infrastructure projects, mentions the use of pricing instruments to support emissions reduction targets and hypothecates traffic infringement fines to safety spending projects.

**Not answered directly, taken from here; [#]Not answered directly, taken from here and here.*

[Update 18 Sep 2023] Since publication of this Briefing, there have been new policy announcements that are covered in our final review of the series available here.

Comment

Within the limitations of the information available, the parties have diverse policies for transport. In terms of policies that might achieve the dual goals of promoting planetary and population health, all parties fall short. The Green Party transport policy is the most promising in terms of reducing emissions and improving health but still has gaps. The scope of the challenge around reducing transport emissions has been laid out clearly in multiple local reports and plans and the urgency of the task could not be clearer.[20-23] So it is disappointing that some of the political parties have not seriously engaged with this in their current policy platforms. The Labour Government has achieved a number of things in the last three years that support a transition to low carbon healthy transport such as Fringe Benefit Tax exemptions for bikes and e-bikes, the Reshaping Streets regulatory package, the National Policy Statement on Urban Development and the Transport Choices Package. However, it is not clear that the draft GPS 2024 is entirely consistent with policies to achieve the needed, and legally mandated, reductions in emissions.

Policies that support transport equity were supported by some, but not all, parties. There appears to be broader support for public transport pricing policies (supported by the Green Party, Labour Party and Te Pati Māori), than e-bike policy (supported by the Green Party only). E-bikes continue to be on the fringe of transport policy despite their significant health

and emissions reduction potential. Te Pati Māori focuses on rural and regional transport which is an area in need of policy attention.

While we asked about policies on sustainable and healthy transport, it is worth noting that some of the policies outlined by parties will harm health and either increase, or fail to reduce, transport greenhouse gas emissions. This is through supporting policy tools that:

- Are known to be insufficient to the task (e.g. the ACT Party's reliance on the ETS as the sole mechanism to reduce transport emissions[22,24])
- Are emissions intensive themselves (e.g. Labour Party's plans for tunnelling[25])
- Generate more driving, support car dependency and/or enable dispersed cities (e.g. the National Party plans for road building[26]). These result in increased greenhouse emissions (e.g. through low density housing and lifecycle vehicle emissions) and adverse health outcomes (e.g. through noise and particulate air pollution and reduced physical activity).
- Are enormously expensive, thus representing a significant opportunity cost. This money could be spent on transport solutions that are known to cost effectively reduce emissions and improve health (or on the struggling health system itself).
- Are paid for by diverting money away from projects within transport that will improve health or reduce emissions (e.g. National will be funding some of the road building proposed from money re-allocated from Vision Zero initiatives ($3b) and public transport ($4.5b) – both of these would have resulted in lower transport injury and public transport also improves health through increasing physical activity).

What is new in this Briefing

- In the lead-up to the election, we outline political party positions on specific and general transport policies.
- We highlight policy gaps that mean no political party is, at present, outlining a full suite of policies that will address the challenges of moving to a low carbon, healthy transport system.
- Some political parties have policies that are a good starting point for this transition; others are promoting policies that are already known to harm health and/or fail to reduce emissions.

Implications for public health policy and practice

- Public health practitioners have a role in making explicit the links between transport and health, the co-benefits of low carbon transport policy and the evidence base around what works and what does not work in moving to a low carbon, healthy transport system.
- Demonstrating how low carbon healthy transport policies can improve people's lives in ways that matter to them is crucial to generate support for these kinds of policies.

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Appendix: Full responses from the five political parties replying to the survey

The questions we posed were:

- Will your party introduce subsidies for purchasing e-bikes for low-income adults and retain the current system of half prices for public transport?
- Please expand on what policies your party will adopt to shift NZ to more sustainable and health promoting transport.

Responses below (as provided by 6 July) are in randomised order.

Te Pāti Māori

Question 1 (subsidies for e-bikes and half price public transport)

Te Pāti Māori support free public transport, which should be implemented immediately for children, students, and community service card holders. All public transport modes should be free for all within five years.

Our focus when it comes to active transport is ensuring infrastructure and urban planning enable safe and accessible active transport, and so we would prioritise safe cycling and walking paths and corridors.

Question 2 (policies to shift to more sustainable and health promoting transport)

Cheap and accessible public and active transport must also be prioritised in regional and rural Aotearoa. The exclusive focus on big cities must end. It must also be acknowledged that private transport will remain a reality, particularly in regional and rural areas. Bringing down costs for low emissions vehicles and electric vehicle infrastructure must therefore be prioritised.

National Party

National's full transport policy will be announced in due course prior to the election.

ACT Party

Question 1 (subsidies for e-bikes and half price public transport) and Question 2 (policies to shift to more sustainable and health promoting transport)

No. The evidence suggests that funding such vanity projects are extremely economically and environmentally inefficient, and, with a national emission cap, effectively act as a form of subsidy to emissions inefficient industries.

ACT supports the Emissions Trading Scheme, with a clear cap on CO2 emissions that will achieve net zero warming by 2050. This will create price signals which will incentivise people to adopt electric vehicles and penalise fossil fuel vehicles.

Green Party

Question 1 (subsidies for e-bikes and half price public transport)

Yes - the Green Party will increase the accessibility of e-bikes for people on low incomes by rolling out community hire schemes through marae, community centres, and educational institutes, together with targeted subsidies. The Green Party will invest in affordable public transport by extending Community Connect with free fares for students and apprentices, community service card holders, everyone under 18, and all Total Mobility card holders.

Question 2 (policies to shift to more sustainable and health promoting transport)

We will:

1. Transform public transport networks, including building light rail in Auckland and Wellington, and providing comprehensive bus lanes in all cities. To contribute to economic development and decarbonisation, we'll invest in nationwide rapid rail for both passengers and freight, to connect regions and major cities.

2. Extend Community Connect with free fares for students and apprentices, community service card holders, everyone under 18, and all Total Mobility card holders, so the people who need to save on their transport costs the most can.

3. Enable the direct provision of public transport services by regional councils, by replacing

the Public Transport Operating Model.

4. Create safe walking and biking routes for every school through more pedestrian crossings, and lower speed limits near schools.

5. Require road and street maintenance projects to consider improvements to active and public transport infrastructure, such as cycleways and busways.

Labour Party

Question 1 (subsidies for e-bikes and half price public transport)

The Labour Government is committed to upgrading New Zealand's transport system to make it safer, greener, and more efficient. E-bikes are a fantastic option to cut carbon and we welcome their increasing presence on our streets. Unfortunately, our manifesto for the 2023 election has not yet been confirmed, so we are unable to make a commitment on e-bike subsidies at this point. However, we are committed to giving more people more sustainable choices to get around.

Question 2 (policies to shift to more sustainable and health promoting transport)

One of the key actions in the Emissions Reduction plan was to reduce reliance on cars and to support people to walk, cycle and use public transport. That's why in December 2022, we announced that as part of the Transport Choices Package, forty-six councils across Aotearoa New Zealand, from large metro centres to small provincial towns, will receive funding to implement more transport options for communities. The proposed initiatives are far-reaching, from cycle-lanes in Kerikeri, to a 2km shared path in Porirua, and new cycling facilities in Invercargill.

We're also starting to see the benefits of a government focussed on real transport choices. Projects like the Tamaki Drive cycleway and the New Lynn to Avondale shared path in Auckland, as well as many of the shovel-ready cycleways in Christchurch have been completed under this Government.

The severe weather events of this year have also highlighted how crucial it is to invest in early preventative works to protect our transport network against the effects of a changing climate. That's why in Budget 2023, we made A $279 million investment package for State Highways that will focus on slip prevention, flood mitigation, and managing risk of sea level rise to increase resilience.

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