

Speech Notes for opening of North Shore Busway

Saturday 2 February 2008

Greetings to Honoured Guests: Prime Minister, Chair Transit, Mayor, Chair of ARTA, Councillors etc.

Ladies and Gentlemen. This is a proud day for the North Shore, for the Auckland region and indeed for New Zealand.

I want to thank all the organisations - and individuals within those organisations - who made this busway happen - and I want to thank the Fletcher construction workers who toiled long and hard to build it. So to Transit NZ, North Shore City Council (can I also acknowledge former Mayor George Wood and the former chairman of Infrastructure Auckland John Robertson), Auckland City Council and to the Auckland Regional Council Group including ARTA, I offer sincere thanks for your magnificent cooperative efforts.

The word "partnership" has become something of a cliché nowadays however the individuals and agencies who worked so well together to build this busway were genuine partners.

But most of all I want to thank the government - and in particular you Prime Minister because to give credit where credit is due - the idea of a busway on the North Shore had been talked about for some 20 years - but it was just talk - so let it be not forgotten that it was the leadership of the Clark Labour-led government that was decisive in the construction of the North Shore Busway.

And the good news is - the tremendous progress so dramatically evident here today is happening all over the Auckland region; - with the upgrade and reconstruction of the long neglected rail network - which commenced some years after the busway - proceeding very rapidly. Then there is also the other

major highway projects now underway - in some cases completed - after languishing on the drawing boards for decades.

Getting around Auckland and particularly around the North Shore is going to be so much more easier and faster thanks to this superb new busway and the new services that go with it.

The public support thus far for services running through the first two busway stations has been immensely encouraging. The Northern Express Bus service has averaged 58,000 journeys every month, over 1 million people have used the limited services already - 39% apparently using public transport for the first time - and that can only increase significantly now that the full facility has been completed. There will be buses coming every five minutes on key routes during peak hours, (like a train on rubber tyres) better connections and more direct routes and sooner rather than later transferable ticketing. And clearly such has been the public demand for park and ride that I believe we are going to have to build more to cater for that need.

Finally I want to thank here the regional ratepayers for their contribution - nearly 60% of the regional rates, and sizeable amounts of regional capital is now going into public transport services and infrastructure. It is therefore essential that we have a public transport service purchasing regime which is fair, equitable and sustainable over the long term for the people who have to pay for it - the ratepayers. We therefore look to the government to provide just that. And we are confident that it will.

All of us are all only too aware that since the mid 1980's Auckland's public transport patronage performance has been below what would be expected of a city/region of this size (there were reasons for that but it was not the fault of the people of the region) - but we are confident and indeed determined to turn that situation around. And we are succeeding. We are succeeding because we now have the commitment for funding, the people and the will - to do it.

After all Ladies and Gentlemen there is no reason at all why Auckland cannot become once again one of the best public transport cities in the world. Today is about celebrating this vastly significant milestone along the way to that bright destination.

Once again my thanks to you all.