

MIN-4163 Bus Driver Safety Initiatives

12 May 2023

Provide information about work being done to address bus driver safety, particularly in Auckland.

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's response:

- Information gathered directly from Public Transport Authorities (PTAs) and the largest Bus Operators indicates there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour from the public towards bus drivers. This behaviour ranges from verbal threats and abuse to physical assault causing injury to drivers.

Health and Safety (H&S) work already in place

- Operators have the primary duty of care as a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA). As contractors of services, PTAs are also PCBU and have overlapping duties with operators.
- Together, these groups are actively progressing a range of measures to address the personal safety risks to bus drivers. There are also effective relationships in place with Police who support several of the safety measure already in place.
- Measures already in place include:
 - Emergency panic buttons in every bus that automatically alert Police of an emergency incident along with GPS co-ordinates.
 - CCTV to act as a deterrent and to capture incidents as they occur. Audio recordings on these systems are also immediately activated when the panic button is pressed.
 - All vehicles have open communication lines to operations control centres, enabling drivers to request guidance and alert the control centre to any situations that the driver feels don't warrant an immediate police callout, or may require police but not necessarily to their vehicle (for example, to a bus stop).
 - De-escalation training for drivers undertaken by Operators.
 - Removal of cash from buses – this has already occurred in Auckland and is being considered elsewhere.
 - Passenger behaviour campaigns in Wellington across Buses, Trains, and Ferries (*Ride like your Aunty is watching*) and in Auckland (*Etiquette campaign in development*)
 - Bus interchange security improvements.
 - Visible Transport Officers (there are 42 in Auckland, 10 in Wellington) who undertake revenue protection and safety monitoring/deterrent activities, with priority deployment on trains and inner-city bus links.
 - A crime stoppers campaign and collaboration with Auckland Transport (AT), targeting bus incidents, which is well publicised onboard.
 - Security staff deployed as needed to interchanges and stations where tensions may be escalating

- Ongoing engagement is already underway with Bus Driver Unions to identify issues and explore collaborative solutions.
- A trial in Auckland of Driver Protection Screens.
- A four-week trial has been carried out recently, which deployed roving security guards (who worked in pairs) on afternoon and evening Link services in Auckland. Intelligence was shared daily with Transport Officers.

Further activities under development and sector leadership

- A small focus group has convened to explore where collaborative efforts may make gains and to accelerate implementation of improvements nationwide. The focus group comprises of:
 - Barry Kidd – Interim Chief Executive, Bus and Coach Association.
 - Stacey Van der Putten - Executive General Manager Safety, Auckland Transport.
 - Delaney Myers - Manager Public Transport, Waka Kotahi.
- Support from subject matter experts from each organisation, who are collaborating on:
 - Improved understanding for all PTAs on their obligations as a PCBU.
 - The expansion of the current Driver Protection Screen trial in Auckland, with a view to implement screens nationwide.
 - Sharing of passenger behaviour campaigns.
 - Providing best practise guidelines for Operators, noting that while all operators undertake de-escalation training, some Operators have more robust practises in place than others.
 - Improved safety event reporting.

Driver Protection Screens

- The trial which is currently underway is self-funded by NZ Bus and involves two buses being retrofitted with Driver Protection Screens, which create a see-through barrier between drivers and passengers. To date, the trial has involved 210 drivers over a 16-week period on the City Link service.
- All drivers completed a survey about their experience, covering a wide variety of themes, including their feeling of safety and the design of the screens. The driver survey responses were extremely positive with 79 percent of respondents reporting that they felt as safe or safer with the screens in place, and most drivers reporting a preference for screens to be installed on all buses. This is notable, because a prior trial undertaken over ten years ago did not find favour with drivers.
- Considerations and assumptions for rolling out Driver Protection Screens across the fleet include:
 - Design improvements
 - Achieving wide buy-in to the screens across all Operators and drivers
 - A scalable rollout plan
 - Economies of scale that could be achieved with a national approach
 - Funding
- The next steps are to expand the trial across other Auckland based operators, on a self-funded basis. Supporting best practice guidance on de-escalation and conflict management remains critical to a successful rollout.

National Guidelines and Standards for Best Practise

- As required by HSWA, Operators individually develop their own health and safety guidelines and approaches to keep their staff safe.
- Notwithstanding this, the focus group is exploring where National Guidelines and Standards may add value across the sector to strengthen the work that Operators and PTAs have in place.
- In addition, there is an opportunity to take successful campaigns and approaches and share these amongst regions and operators. Waka Kotahi can also play a role here by using our communication channels to support campaigns. For example, to facilitate a national rollout of Auckland Transport's Etiquette campaign that is currently under development.
- Waka Kotahi also has guidance in place for public transport design for PTAs and Operators. While the health and safety aspects of this guidance is focused on operations and infrastructure, it includes some guidance for layover and rest facilities for drivers at interchange locations. It is also worth exploring whether the public transport design framework may be a useful channel to extend health and safety guidance more closely aligned to the public interface and not just operational and infrastructure requirements.
- There may also be opportunities for updates to the Requirements for Urban Buses (RUB) for further safety measures onboard.

Next Steps

- We note your interest in delivering safety improvements for bus drivers and plan to brief you with a more comprehensive proposal and timeline in July 2023, once we have broader input from the sector and Unions to better indicate costs and barriers.
- The focus group and NZ Bus would like to invite you to view the Safety Protection Screens in Auckland and talk with drivers about the trial and the other safety measures in place for them in their workplace. If you would like to do this, Delaney Myers can facilitate this, including representation from Auckland Transport, the Operator and Union.
- Further trials by other Operators in Auckland are the next step for the sector to achieve buy in about the benefits of Safety Protection Screens. To support this, a case study of the trial would be developed by Auckland Transport and profiled in the BCA monthly publication to the sector, the Circular magazine. If you would like to be interviewed as part of this article, or provide any input, we can co-ordinate this with the BCA.
- Waka Kotahi will consider amendments to the RUB to require new vehicles entering the fleet to be fitted with protection screens. This equipment is commonplace overseas and a standard build option.
- While Operators would pay for the retrofit of further trials, we are exploring funding options that could support this work and a larger national rollout.