MINO-462 CPF review – Public Transport Mask Mandate

2 September 2022

This note provides the Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency opinion on the options presented in the draft Cabinet Paper on the COVID-19 Protection Framework review, due to go to Cabinet on 5 September 2022.

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's response:

- As the public health matters of the Cabinet Paper do not cross into the operational matters that Waka Kotahi is responsible for, we have no comments to make regarding the content of the Cabinet Paper or recommendation 10. There are valid reasons for both retaining and removing the mandate.

- However, we wish to make the following observations:

Effect of mask rule on patronage

- Covid Tracker surveys in March and May 2022 showed more people were put off using public transport by others' failure to wear masks (23 percent in March, 13 percent in May) than were put off by mandatory masks (5 percent in March, 8 percent in May). This gap has been shrinking as COVID-19 case rates have reduced; however, worries about contracting COVID-19 remained a factor for 33 percent of people who have reduced their use of public transport in May 2022, which had only slightly decreased since March 2022 (36 percent).

Other considerations

- Wearing masks reduces COVID-19 transmission, particularly in situations with limited ventilation. However, mask rules are more credible when they are consistent, and it may stigmatise public transport to have a stricter rule than comparable situations.

- Indicatively, feedback from those delivering public transport services shows a preference for face coverings being "recommended" rather than mandated. This is largely because of pressures on drivers to enforce the mandate (despite not being expected to) which has resulted in anti-social behaviour, including verbal and physical assaults on bus drivers and between public transport users.

COVID-19 tracker survey results

- The latest results are publicly available at COVID-19 impacts on transport | Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency (nzta.govt.nz):

Date of survey	COVID-19 daily average reported new cases	**Mask rule supports patronage**: I am concerned that **other people** are not wearing masks on public transport	**Mask rule reduces patronage: I** don't want to have to wear a mask when using public transport
March 10-14, 2022	20,000/day	23%	5%
May 26-31, 2022	7,000/day	13%	8%

Released under the Official Information Act 1982