

Helping customers move confidently around Tāmaki Makaurau and ensuring equitable access by building a world-class, bi-lingual audio experience on buses

For decision: For noting:

Te tūhonga / Recommendation

That the Auckland Transport Board (board):

1. Note 'On Bus Connectivity' programme progress delivered in the last year, with particular focus on the on the audio experience on buses for customers including blind / low vision customers, extension of te reo Māori on the public transport network and improved trust and confidence for customers navigating Tāmaki Makaurau.
2. Note the forward plan for the project including the rollout of audio on 1,400 buses for customers throughout 2022-2023.

Te whakarāpopototanga matua / Executive summary

3. The aim of this project is to grow trust and confidence with customers when travelling on public transport (PT). Audio on buses will provide customers with simple and easy navigational support during their on-bus journey, including upcoming bus stop information and helpful guidance at transfer locations. With over 20% of customer trips including a transfer, audio announcements improve the transfer experience. The combination of these audio messages is a significant improvement to the accessibility of PT for blind and low vision customers.
4. The first milestone was achieved in August 2021 with 6,000+ bus stops re-named to be simpler and more memorable for customers, with priority around landmarks, rather than street addresses. With meaningful engagement with Local Boards, Bus Operators, the Blind and Low Vision community, the Māori Policy and Engagement team and customers, over 1,000 of the proposed bus stop changes were updated based on their valuable feedback. All of the stop names have been translated and recorded in English and te reo Māori.
5. Auckland Transport (AT) is committed to te reo Māori being seen, heard, spoken and learned across Tāmaki Makaurau and supports the 2020-2021 AT Business Plan directive regarding Māori wellbeing outcomes, expectations, and aspirations of Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi. AT's Māori Policy and Engagement Team have been deeply involved throughout the project. They have provided valuable guidance, and input across many facets of the project, helping to ensure the 6,000+ bus stop names have been correctly translated. Audio announcements will be bilingual with te reo Māori first followed by English, building on the bilingual wayfinding signage being rolled out across all major projects. When implementation is complete in 2023, the entire public transport network will have consistent English and te reo Māori announcements across all digital customer communication platforms e.g. AT Mobile, google maps, and real time signs.

6. In January 2022, the second major milestone was achieved with the hardware installed onto the first trial bus on 27 January. This provides three key benefits: faster AT HOP top-ups (from up to 72 hours down to one hour) which has been a pain point for our customers, bilingual audio announcements to help customers navigate easily with confidence and a new Global Positioning System (GPS).

Ngā tuhinga ō mua / Previous deliberations

7. There are no previous deliberations on this topic.

Te horopaki me te tīaroaro rautaki / Context and strategic alignment

8. Implementing audio announcements on buses achieves outcomes required within multiple AT strategic plans including the Accessibility Action Plan, the Regional Land Transport Plan (2021-2031), the Regional Public Transport Plan (2018-2028) as well as the 'Transport and Access' outcome in the Auckland Plan 2050. The programme is also part of AT's Statement of Intent (2021-2024), the AT Business Plan, and AT strategic objectives. Examples of how the programme will contribute to these objectives include providing excellent customer experiences, making the transport system safer, whirinaki (building customer trust and confidence), supporting Māori wellbeing, collaborating with communities and stakeholders, and better connecting people by improving travel choices (particularly for blind/vision impaired customers).
9. In 2017, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission notified AT of complaints from Blind Citizens New Zealand of alleged unlawful discrimination under Part 1A of the Human Rights Act 1993. Both parties agreed to mediation. One of the key mediation outcomes was AT committing to considering on-bus next stop audio announcements. The programme team have worked closely with the Blind and Low Vision community as the team have researched, developed and refined the audio announcements with their valuable input and feedback.

Ngā matapakinga me ngā tātaritanga / Discussion and analysis

10. A three-week design sprint with the Customer Experience Design team was undertaken in December 2020. The aim of this was to uncover the customer pain points and set into place a plan to address these within audio announcements. The main pain points included lack of accessibility and wayfinding assistance for blind and low vision customers, customers not knowing which stop to get off at (approximately 5,000 queries to bus drivers each day), 180,000 customers avoiding trips with transfers in them due to complexity and lack of wayfinding support and safety issues at night resulting in customers not being able to see their stops.
11. The project team completed international best practice research, engaged with customer groups, built prototypes, and undertook comprehensive customer testing. This resulted in a set of clear recommendations around audio messaging requirements (see figure 1 below).

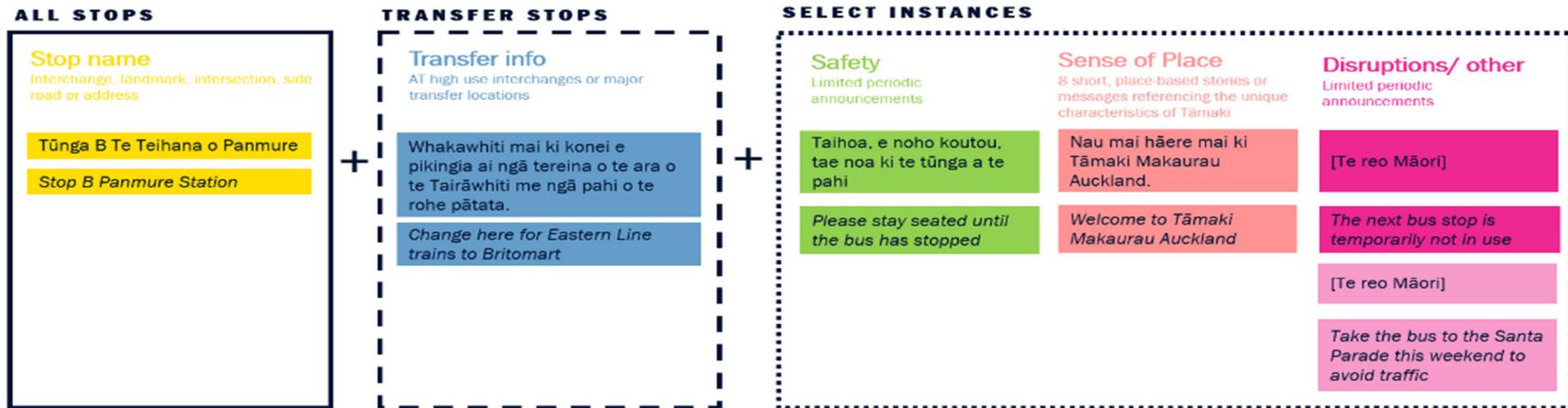


Figure 1: Proposed message types to be delivered as part of the project, derived from customer testing.

12. In July 2021, AT’s Chief Executive approved the On Bus Connectivity Business Case. Since then, over 6,000 bus stops have been re-named to be simpler and more memorable for customers, with priority around landmarks rather than street addresses. These have been updated in AT Mobile, google maps and other digital platforms and are consistent with the audio stop names.
13. Audio announcements will be bilingual, consistent with bilingual wayfinding being delivered for major new projects across Tāmaki Makaurau. This builds on AT’s commitment for te reo Māori to be seen, heard, spoken, and learned across the transport network and supports the 2020-2021 AT Business Plan directive regarding Māori wellbeing outcomes, expectations, and aspirations of Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi.
14. The ‘Voice of AT’ for te reo Māori and English were selected following comprehensive customer testing of 120 voice talent options using the key criteria of warm, welcoming, relatable, useful, clear with excellent pronunciation of te reo Māori names. Both currently provide bilingual audio for customers on other modes, so this provides consistency across public transport modes for customers.
15. As well as basic bus stop information, the project team have been looking to create a meaningful customer experience onboard AT buses. AT also plan to include short audio storytelling messaging at strategic locations around the city that create a ‘sense of place’. These messages will enrich the customer experience and connect people to the unique values, culture, and identity of Tāmaki Makaurau, “the place loved by many and with many stories”. Eight stories have initially been created and recorded with help from the Māori Policy and Engagement Team. The first story is being trialled on the Eastern Busway and shares the story about Maungarei/Mt Wellington, ‘the watchful mountain’.

16. The first bus has been launched on Route 70 from Botany to Britomart via Panmure with on bus connectivity hardware and software. Customers have begun providing feedback via QR codes and an online survey. In person interviews will be undertaken to provide further qualitative feedback particularly around how customers perceive the tone, content, format, usefulness, volume, and number of announcements on buses. The project team will continue to listen to and respond to customer feedback as more buses and routes have audio announcements introduced. This will lead to further improvements to the on-bus audio experience for customers.

Ngā tūraru matua / Key risks and mitigations

Key risk	Mitigation
The Blind Citizens New Zealand complaint to the Human Rights Commission is not addressed to their satisfaction who in-turn lodge proceedings with the Human Rights Tribunal.	The project team has worked collaboratively with the Blind Low Vision Network and Blind Citizens New Zealand over the last 15 months. They have been a key partner and been deeply involved at each stage of development and testing. They are strongly supportive of the progress being made and look forward to these being on buses to help their members.
Lack of bus operator and union support – Tranzurban have for example raised concerns in respect to drivers who would be forced to listen to announcements throughout their shifts.	Management is ensuring that bus operators, drivers and unions are aware of changes and understand why the project is necessary and how to provide feedback. The Project Team received a good range of feedback about the bus stop re-naming, with the team updating many stops based on this.
Negative customer feedback (for instance ‘too much audio’ or regarding the use of te reo Māori).	The project team undertook significant international research and robust testing with customers to develop and refine the audio messaging and overall experience. A comprehensive communications and media plan is in progress. The project team have also created a list of Frequently Asked Questions and data to help responses. For instance, our analysis indicates audio will be playing for around 10% of an average customer journey.
Supply chain delays to deliver the hardware required, resulting in delays to the wider project.	The Business Technology team have been in regular communication with suppliers to have clarity around delivery timeframes, any delays and cost options to resolve.

Ngā ritenga-ā-pūtea me ngā rauemi / Financial and resource impacts

17. Funding for the On-Bus Connectivity project is sourced from AT’s Enterprise Technology Investment Plan, which has approved capital funding for the next 3 years of \$50m per annum in the 2021/2022 RLTP; with a funding contribution of 46% from Waka Kotahi.

Ngā whaiwhakaaro ō te taiao me te panonitanga o te āhuarangi / Environment and climate change considerations

18. Improving the accessibility and quality of public transport and customers' experiences will help make public transport a more viable and preferable option for more people. This project will make an important contribution to improving public transport customer experiences, which in turn may encourage and enable more Aucklanders to reduce their reliance on emissions-intensive private vehicles.
19. The project team are also investigating options around audio messages that could help share the low carbon story and positive impacts customers are having each day with their transport mode choices.

Ngā whakaaweawe me ngā whakaaro / Impacts and perspectives

Mana whenua

20. This project has implemented the Auckland Council's Māori Language Policy that was endorsed by the Auckland Transport Board. The policy acknowledges te reo Māori dialects of the mana whenua in Tāmaki Makaurau. The 'sense of place' story narratives were chosen carefully with shared common understandings from mana whenua.

Ngā mema pōti / Elected members

21. The project team circulated the proposed bus stop name changes to Local Board Members in August and September 2021 for comment. Six Local Boards provided detailed feedback with suggested amendments to proposed bus stop names. The project team reviewed these, adopted many of the suggestions and provided feedback and reasoning for the remainder.

Ngā rōpū kei raro i te Kaunihera / Council Controlled Organisations

22. Not applicable.

Ngā kiritaki / Customers

23. Customers are at the heart of this project and have been involved in each step on the journey, as demonstrated above. This is not simply about providing customers with next stop information. It is about creating a genuinely positive customer experience on the bus that is memorable, enjoyable and useful. By delivering this, it will continue to build trust and confidence with customers, stakeholders and AT.

Ngā whaiwhakaaro haumarū me ngā whaiwhakaaro hauora / Health, safety and wellbeing considerations

24. Additional audio messages will continue to be developed over time and iteratively implemented to further assist customers. These include building further messages around transfers with helpful destination information, safety, disruptions, and building te reo stop names into AT Mobile and other digital platforms.
25. On-bus safety announcements will also be played including messages to remind passengers to stay seated between stops or to hold on tightly to reduce risks.

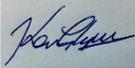
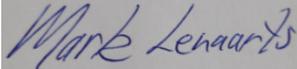
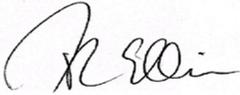
Ā muri ake nei / Next steps

26. By July 2022 (pending any further COVID-19 related delays such as supply chain), AT should have around 50 buses with the audio and the connectivity solution installed. A large shipment of modems is expected in July 2022, enabling the roll-out to accelerate, with an indicative completion date of on bus connectivity devices installed on all 1,400 AT buses by around mid-2023.
27. Additional audio messages will continue to be developed across this time and iteratively implemented to further assist customers. These include building further messages around transfers with helpful destination information, safety, disruptions, low carbon storytelling and building te reo stop names into AT Mobile and other digital platforms.

Te whakapiringa / Attachment

Attachment number	Description
1	Auckland Transport Board - presentation slides

Te pou whenua tuhinga / Document ownership

Submitted by	Kevin Glynn Group Manager Customer and Digital Experience	
	Mark Lenaarts Product Manager Wayfinding	
Recommended by	Lillian Tahuri Head of Māori Engagement	
	Vanessa Ellis Executive General Manager – Customer Experience	
Approved for submission	Shane Ellison Chief Executive	

Helping customers move confidently around Tāmaki Makaurau and ensuring equitable access

By building a world-class audio experience on buses

Update to Auckland Transport Board, February 2022

**CONFIDENCE AND
EQUITABLE ACCESS**



The On-Bus Connectivity Project



Faster HOP card top ups

- Reduce the HOP top up wait time from up to 72 hours to 1 hour for bus users
- Reduce the number declined trips by ~60% with faster HOP top-ups
- Reduce calls related to top ups



Future proofing on-bus technology

- Up to \$1.5 m reduced service fees costs with new automatic vehicle locators (AVLs) on buses
- Prepare for future improvements e.g. national ticketing system, pay wave etc



On-bus audio announcements

- Improved bus accessibility, especially for low vision customers
- Eliminate need for customers to ask bus drivers to call out when the bus is arriving at certain stops (customers make up to 7,000 of these requests daily)
- Succinct & useful messages - 90%+ 'quiet time' (no audio) on the average bus trip



Discovering what makes a great on-board audio experience for customers?

Video shown will be shown during board presentation



Using customer insights to find the right voice for our buses



Through customer testing, we worked out the ideal voice talent requirements



Refined a long list of voice talent:

120 → 10 → 2 → 1



‘Voice of Auckland Transport’ decided



The importance of te reo Māori

- Kia kaha te reo Māori – in line with AT’s commitment for te reo Māori to be seen, spoken, heard and learned
- Te reo Māori on buses – audio cue for English-only speakers
- Contributing to the unique bilingual identity of Tāmaki Makaurau



“I am proud our te reo is being utilised ... our te reo was lost for so many years”



Where to from here?



Proactive Comms planning, FAQ, web page, risk mitigation



Stop announcements, faster Hop top-up & real-time tracking roll out begins



Transfer messaging roll out



Sense of place messaging



Disruption messaging testing/ roll out



Te reo stop names on digital channels

~JAN 2022

~JUN 2023



CUSTOMER TESTING & FEEDBACK ON AUDIO-EQUIPPED BUSES ONGOING FROM JAN 2022 ONWARDS

