

Editorial & Letters

We Say You Say

Whacking plastic on the head

New Zealanders of an older vintage will remember when milk in towns was delivered in glass bottles, and goods weren't multi-layered in plastic. Those days may be making a comeback of sorts with an official attempt to put some plastic in the rear-view mirror.

Kiwis have an ignoble record on waste-creation. On average, we each throw away an estimated 159g every day. Our households go through about 1.76 billion plastic containers annually, and nearly 100 million plastic drink and milk bottles end up in rubbish bins.

And we are not great at food waste either – we bin \$2.4 billion of food waste annually.

Government moves to ban hard-to-recycle products by mid-2025 will cull common items such as plastic cutlery, cotton buds, PVC meat trays and polystyrene takeaway containers. Drink stirrers, plastic plates and bowls, straws and fruit labels will be phased out.

It has drawn criticism from Greenpeace for overlooking plastic drink bottles, while supermarket chains say they are already phasing out single-use plastics. Countdown sustainability general manager Kiri Hannifin told RNZ "we do need help with innovation... it's not just the packaging, we also urgently need to sort out our recycling infrastructure".

The new programme follows the ban on single-use plastic bags. People have quickly got used to paper and reusable carry bags. Environment Minister David Parker said the 2019 move meant more than a billion fewer plastic bags have ended up in landfills or the ocean.

It's among a range of environmental actions that have fanned out to impact on everyday lives.

The concept of low-traffic neighbourhoods has been controversial both in Auckland and in the UK. A trial in Onehunga was cancelled in May after opposition by residents to street closures.

And letting green areas resemble hay paddocks has become a growing trend in England.

The No Mow May effort to help plants, insects and animals has, for instance, been adopted by Salisbury Cathedral with a decision to stop mowing the lawns once a year during May. Part of the area will be left unknown year round.

Environmental issues are increasingly coming down to personal and mundane levels. Plastic has long been emblematic of throwaway, disposable societies, yet the phase-out plan is also good news for people flustered by how much rubbish accumulates in their homes. The quick, easy plastic option tends to stick around. It is also welcome for those who like items with a bit of permanence and character rather than functional but meaningless. As with health problems, the key to avoiding plastic is prevention – providing better alternatives to going down the cheap, thoughtless and bad path.

Just like reusable shopping bags, the only time we'll remember our addiction to single-use plastics will be to wonder why we didn't change sooner.

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Negative effects of 'planning'

While we are all being prompted to combat climate change, Auckland Council appears to be doing the opposite with roading changes that are snarling up traffic in town centres such as Henderson, Onehunga and Pukekohe.

These changes are having bifurcated negative effects for our climate. Within the town centre the travel delays cause more fuel burn by more slowly moving cars and, perhaps ironically, public transport buses. Conversely, the frustration caused by the chaos is simultaneously incentivising others to drive further afield to do their shopping. In the case of Henderson, this appears to benefit Westgate and New Lynn. If these changes are intended to drive people from their cars, then this substitution of shopping effect will more than offset any reduction in town-centre traffic.

Climate is not the only area negatively impacted as these changes are killing Main Street shopping. Challenged by Covid and facing fierce competition from online and Mall shopping, the last thing these struggling retailers need are artificial disincentives to using their respective town centres. "Save Our Stores" posters are now common in these areas.

For both climate and business reasons, the council should reconsider these changes.

Peter Jansen, Henderson.

Driving change

Given that Auckland Transport is signing off the Regional Transport Plan and has ignored the 6000 public submissions on concerns that it is not doing enough about the climate crisis, I hope it has an insurance policy to cover property damage from sea-level rise, and extreme storms, and the multiple insurance claims that result from this inaction, and gross negligence.

As a double-decker bus passed me this morning with two people aboard, and the road was at gridlock with cars – one thinks something has to change. Aucklanders can all help through driving fewer kilometres and using public transport or cycling and walking. We are all in this together and need to take action now, but Auckland Transport has the ability and the responsibility for turning this around and facilitating change.

Alison Feeney, Remuera.

Higher shame

Simon Wilson shames Auckland Transport (NZ Herald, June 28) for its lack of ambition in reducing Auckland's carbon emissions. Indeed, the RLTP's goal of reducing them by 1 per cent makes a mockery of the council's recent declaration of a climate emergency.

But Wilson is wrong in arguing that climate action in cities is about "less driving". It is actually about less of any mobility that involves motorised transport. After all – what about all those trucks and vans, apparently so vital to Auckland's present economy?



The only radical solution to our excessive transport emissions is to reduce the overall demand. Diversifying the supply – such as having more public transport and EVs – only changes the type of our impact on nature.

We must profoundly change the economy of our city and the lifestyle of its citizens which now rest on extravagant mobility encouraged by cheap vehicles and fuel, and free-for-all roads. This calls for hefty price increases of all elements of the transport system. These painful interventions are far beyond AT's mandate. Somebody higher up than the AT board should be ashamed for not telling us as it is: we must live, work, shop and socialise locally.

Dushko Bogunovich, adjunct professor, Auckland University.

Going electric

I would like to correct a couple of points in Jeff Hayward's letter (NZ Herald, June 28) about diesel buses in Auckland.

Auckland Transport has committed to accelerating the transition to zero-emissions buses; no more diesel buses will be bought from this week, July 1, 2021 – not 2025, as Mr Hayward said.

AT now has 33 zero-emissions buses in operation and is in commercial discussions with a number of bus operators to deploy more electric buses in the next 2-3 years. This includes the necessary electricity network upgrades with high voltage connections to bus depots.

Mark Hannan, media relations manager, Auckland Transport.

Good job

How refreshing to read another letter of an efficient, friendly and free Covid vaccination. I completely endorse correspondent Lucy Lamb's (NZ Herald, June 28) views and can say that our experience in Tauranga was a stress-free, almost pleasant one.

Well done to all concerned.

Geoff Gipton, Ōmōkororo.

Herd mentality

That was an excellent article (NZ Herald, June 28) by Professor Ananish Chandhuri regarding how long before we can safely open our borders.

In other words: How many of our lives and how much of our freedom of expression should we sacrifice on the altar of safety and security?

When will our scientific advisors finally come to the conclusion that nature will never allow us to eliminate influenza; this current virus; and others that will follow?

When will we understand that we must learn to live with this virus as we have with countless others?

P. C. Sewell, Campbells Bay.

Spread the word

Margarine is defined in the dictionary as "imitation butter". One visual difference is that it is sold in a plastic container. Shouldn't it be possible to wrap it in block form as butter is done? That could remove a huge amount of plastic from our waste.

Jeanette Grant, Mt Eden.

Last post

The rebranding of NZ Post looks terrible and now makes the organisation and the service it provides unrecognisable. There was nothing wrong with the well-established envelope logo and red colour scheme, distinctly associated with NZ Post for decades.

The Government should be questioning the appropriateness of spending \$15m on an unnecessary rebranding exercise while this struggling State-owned enterprise continues to receive taxpayer support. I'm sure most taxpayers would rather see this money go towards keeping more PostShops open.

Isaac Broome, Pukekohe.

Gattung praise

I think the letter (NZ Herald, June 28) regarding Theresa Gattung is wide of the mark. Telecom was split from the Post Office in the late 1980s. Theresa was appointed to her role at Telecom after Rob Deane in the 1990s and, as far as I know, was never near the Post Office.

Instead of throwing stones, we should be taking our hats off for giving \$2.5 million to assist women in the business world.

Gordon Kay, Lynfield.

Collision course

Nice for the K Rd cyclist (NZ Herald, June 28) that their ride is now "much safer and more enjoyable". Getting my ancient bones off the bus at stop number 7130 was neither safer nor enjoyable. Seeing only grey footpath, I nearly stepped into collision with a speeding cyclist.

On June 11, I phoned Auckland Council to report the safety issue and ask that the area be completed in bike lane pink paint, pronto. It has not been acknowledged. Got a spare tin of paint, Mr Mayor? I reckon I could tape a paintbrush to the end of my walking stick and get the job done to alert fellow pedestrians to be aware of a hazard.

Mary Cornford, Pt Chevalier.

Young vapers

I was interested to see the article "Vaping – at 10" (NZ Herald, June 25).

While reported youth vaping anecdotes are deeply concerning and unacceptable, they're not supported by any significant empirical evidence to date. After examining a survey of over 27,000 secondary school students, University of Auckland researchers last year found only 0.8 per cent of 14 and 15-year-olds who had never smoked were regular vapers. Researchers subsequently confirmed there was no youth vaping epidemic in New Zealand.

Last year's Smokefree Environments and Regulated Products (Vaping) Amendment Act axed all vaping advertising and made youth access much harder. Without doubt, the Government now needs to get really tough at point-of-sale. If any retailer breaks the law and sells vaping products to minors under 18, the book must be thrown at them.

Nancy Loucas, co-director of Aotearoa Vapers Community Advocacy.

Submission guidelines

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Letters should not exceed 200 words and must carry the author's signature, name and residential address. Emailed letters must include a full residential address and phone number, allowing a check on bona fides. Attachments will not be accepted. Norms de plume are not accepted; names are withheld only in special circumstances at the discretion of the editor. Letters may be edited, abridged or discarded.

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