



## **Greens put "Save the Overlander" campaign on the rails**

Jeanette Fitzsimons MP, Green Party Co - Leader and Transport Spokesperson

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The Green Party is today launching a nationwide campaign calling for a two year stay of execution on plans to scrap in late September the Overlander passenger train link between Auckland and Wellington.


"This two year breathing space will give time both to carry out the urgent track upgrades that are necessary to transform the Overlander into a modern, reliable service, and also to enact the marketing strategy required to boost passenger numbers and return the service to profitability," Green Party Co-Leader and Transport Spokesperson Jeanette Fitzsimons says.

"To kick this campaign into high gear, three Green MPs - Keith Locke, Sue Kedgley and myself - will be on the departure platform for the Overlander on Tuesday, to gather signatures for our nationwide petition aimed at saving the service," Ms Fitzsimons says.

"Scrapping this service is such a backward step. Around the world, there has been a marked upsurge in support for train travel as a tourism experience. Yet In New Zealand, little effort has ever gone into marketing the Overlander as a travel option, whether for tourists or for domestic travellers.

"We now urgently need to win a reprieve, so that Toll can work in conjunction with Tourism New Zealand and others, to create a targeted marketing campaign to boost passenger numbers.

"Beyond its untapped tourism potential, the Overlander also provides genuine social benefits. It links two university towns -

 Hamilton and Palmerston North - and serves a number of communities up and down the track, that would be hit very hard indeed by the sudden disappearance of this essential service.

"Beyond the marketing drive, there is a pressing need for the track to be upgraded. The Greens believe that the Government should be meeting those costs, in a fashion consistent with its current policy of totally funding the cost of highways in this country.

"The Green Party campaign seeks to remove the shadow of the noose now hanging over the Overlander service. Once we can win a breathing space, the detail work can then be done by pulling together all of the expertise and resources needed to save this iconic part of our public transport system.

"The Overlander and its rail track are a key strategic asset in a sustainable economy. Rail and rail freight uses almost four times less energy than the equivalent on roads. It thus reduces our reliance on foreign oil, vulnerability to oil price spikes, and our overall contribution to climate change."

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