
SUPPORT THE OVERLANDER CAMPAIGN:

The Proposal

The Green Party is calling upon the Government to guarantee the continued operation of the iconic Overlander passenger service for the next two years while the following important steps are undertaken:

- ☆ A study is initiated to assess the long-term viability of the service.
- ☆ An integrated marketing campaign is conducted to further increase passenger numbers.
- ☆ The necessary resources are invested by Ontrack to return the rail track back to a standard that will allow the service to run reliably.

Background Information

The Overlander train service is one of the last great long-distance passenger train services left in New Zealand. It runs twice daily between Auckland and Wellington connecting four university towns and nine other rural towns, many not serviced by air transport. Toll NZ has recently announced that the service will be ending September 30, 2006, 97 years after it first began.

The Greens see the Overlander service and the rail track it runs on as one of New Zealand's most strategic assets in a sustainable economy. Rail and rail freight uses almost four times less energy than the equivalent on roads thus reducing our reliance on foreign oil, our vulnerability to oil price spikes, and our overall contribution to climate change.

A well marketed and reliable Overlander service is capable of transporting over 100,000 people a year throughout the heart of the North Island. People in trains keep cars off our roads making our roads safer and less congested. Rail attributable fatalities are 2% of those on our roads.

Rail operators in New Zealand face an unfair playing field when it comes to economic subsidies. Roads are heavily subsidised by the taxpayer while rail companies are required to negotiate track user charges with the Government based on a full cost-recovery pricing model. Unlike New Zealand, nearly every other country in the West heavily subsidises their rail transport networks. The equivalent overland rail service in Australia recently experienced a 40% rise in patronage since the Government stepped in to subsidise the service.

Finally, the Overlander is one of the great iconic train journeys in New Zealand important both culturally and for our tourist industry. The Overlander has the potential to be one of the great New Zealand tourist experiences. Without it, packaged rail travel options are limited to the remaining two lines in the South Island. Without it, a number of central North Island regions stand to lose the significant economic benefits from the tourism revenue the train service generates.

The Greens ultimately believe the decision to axe the Overlander with little warning and no consultation is short-sighted. We are calling for an interim two-year stay of execution for the service while a thorough feasibility study can be conducted. A decision of such national significance deserves no less.