

MIDDLE EASTERN COMMUNITIES' PUBLIC TRANSPORT NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS IN AUCKLAND

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Abstract: *The multicultural city of Auckland is creating immense challenges and opportunities for transport planning. International examples show that culture, as a defining factor in the travel behaviours of immigrants in multicultural cities, needs to be explored. The impact of changing societal dynamics in Auckland due to immigration necessitates enhanced understanding of the transport needs and aspirations of new communities. The aim of this research is to explore Middle Eastern needs and aspirations for Auckland's public transport. Storytelling through participant interviews and a focus group are chosen as the main technique to gather and analyse data about this immigrant group's experiences of public transport in Auckland. The key findings reveal the distinctive needs and aspirations of the Middle Eastern community. Four main needs are identified; convenience, reliability and certainty, directness, and awareness of changing perceptions of public transport. Further, two main community aspirations emerge; rail-based public transport and proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes. The findings show there are opportunities to change negative pre-conceived community perceptions of public transport through positive experiences of efficient and effective rail-based public transport services in Auckland.*

1. Introduction – Every day travel experiences in multicultural cities

Multicultural cities face many challenges but also provide many opportunities in the 21st century. The main challenge is how to make cities inclusive and sustainable by accommodating diverse cultural needs and aspirations in urban policies (Burayidi, 2003; Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 2000). Sandercock (2000) advocates planning systems, which instead of treating communities as homogeneous, show sensitivity to class, gender, ethnicity and culture to achieve fairness and effectiveness in policies. Historically, formal legislative planning systems in the western world have given little attention to cultural difference, as it was assumed they would become assimilated into the dominant culture (Burayidi, 2000). As a consequence, ethnic minorities often lack engagement with urban planning and policies (Qadeer, 1997). Integration of multiple cultural values is challenging and complex within the formal planning system, and requires the provision of sensitive planning processes and representation in statutory plans (Qadeer 1997).

Increasingly, the literature is documenting the influence of transport mode perceptions and cultural norms on the travel behaviour of individuals (Beirao & Cabral, 2007). For example, cultural perceptions of the car as a pristine status symbol have influenced travel behaviour in many countries (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Similarly, car and public transport usage is embedded in the dominant social and cultural values of many cities such as Los Angeles (car) and London (public transport) (Bean, Kearns, & Collins, 2007). However, transport planning's traditional focus on the relative service quality of particular modes is often a determining factor in mode choice (Eboli & Mazzulla, 2007). Preston and Raje (2007) find that the quality of public transport services, and accessibility and convenience factors influence the utilisations of public transport for journeys to work. Thus, the efficiency of services, travel time, and cost of using transport services are important factors in choosing a transport mode (Jakob, Craig, & Fisher, 2006).

There is agreement that the presence of immigrants in contemporary cities has significantly increased the demand for transportation across all travel modes (Blumenberg, 2009). However, travel behaviours of immigrant communities are believed to differ from those of native-born communities due to cultural perception (Blumenberg, 2009; Blumenberg & Smart, 2009). In the US Blumenberg (2009) and Tal and Handy (2010) argue that immigrants are more likely to utilise public transport on a regular basis than native-born residents. Blumenberg and Smart (2009) state immigrants are three times more likely to use public transport and twice as likely to share travel

journeys in Southern California than the native-born. Reasons for these contrasting travel behaviours include socio-economic and accessibility factors, largely evident for immigrants in the early stages of migration (Blumenberg, 2009).

In recent years, many cities have adopted collaborative and participatory decision-making which provides opportunities for migrant communities to influence planning policies and the direction they take (Healy, 1997, Holden & Scerri, 2012). For example, Vancouver proactively engages immigrant communities in developing urban policies and in achieving a unique vision (Uyesugi & Shipley, 2007). Vancouver has proven that ethnically-sensitive planning policies have the potential to transform cities that embrace cultural diversity and promote sustainability (Uyesugi & Shipley, 2007). Culturally sensitive policies are particularly important in transport planning as Vancouver has achieved high per capita usage of public transport due to the presence of immigrants, intensification of land use, and the network effect of public transport design (Spinney, Scott, & Newbold, 2009). Transport planning in Vancouver incorporates the travel patterns of ethnic cultures to achieve sustainable transport policies (Sandercock, 2000). This approach is the opposite of traditional transport planning which claims neutrality, and dismisses the specific cultural needs of immigrant communities (Pestieu & Wallace, 2003).

Vancouver is a suitable comparator to a city like Auckland, as both cities not only share similar topography, urban density and the strength of their CBD but also aspire to becoming one of the most liveable cities around the world (Imran & Pearce, 2015). Various ethnic groups residing in Auckland have had a significant impact on the cultural fabric of the region. In 2013 Auckland Council conducted research on the attitudes of Auckland residents to multiculturalism (Auckland Council, 2013). The results reveal the majority of the 1,957 individuals surveyed from various ethnicities who answered each question were positive and accepting of immigrants. According to Census 2013, more than 40% of Auckland's residents were born overseas, while 20% of the city's population comprising Asian and ME communities (Auckland Council, 2013). The Middle Eastern (ME) population originate from southwest Asia, where the Asian, African and European continents converge. In the census, the ME communities are counted in the MELAA (ME, Latin American and African) category amounting to approximately 25,000 individuals in total. Among MELAA, over 50 percent of the population are considered ME. This figure has grown sharply, with a 15% population increase between 2006 and 2013, due to immigration for study and work purposes, as well as refugee arrivals, initially from Lebanon, then Iraq, and now Syria (Auckland Council, 2014c). The ME population of Auckland is rather young, the majority of people being aged between 20 and 34 years, (Statistics New Zealand, 2014). The ME community predominantly reside on the North Shore, and in the Eastern suburbs and Papatoetoe (Auckland Council, 2012). Howick, in particular exhibits significant cultural diversity within the local board area, with approximately 50% of the people residing in the area classified as immigrants, mostly from the ME countries (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.). The growing ethnic diversity of Auckland presents an opportunity to transform an automobile-dependent city into one with a thriving public transport system serving the needs and aspirations of immigrant communities.

Traditional transport planning processes pay little attention to ethnic diversity due to a privileging of technocratic views over community needs and aspirations (Burayidi, 2003). Studying the everyday experiences of immigrant communities provides opportunities for planners to extract valuable information and data from individuals and communities as a catalyst to transforming transport policies (Sandercock, 2003, Hine & Mitchell, 2001). The mobilities paradigm focuses on the subjective factors which shape people's everyday experiences of community (Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010). It is very hard to measure or quantify subjective factors but they are crucial in understanding individual (im)mobilities. Studying everyday mobility experiences provides a valuable conceptual framework, to answer the research question *how can exploring the everyday experiences of Middle Eastern immigrant communities improve public transport planning and policies in Auckland?*

This research has two objectives, 1) to explore the everyday transport experiences of ME

immigrant communities to understand their needs, and 2) to understand ME communities' aspirations for public transport. This qualitative analysis identifies ME communities' perceptions, biases and experiences, leading to their varied and variable use of public transport in Auckland. We are interested in unpacking their value structures and feelings about what they regard as desirable public transport solutions. This will help in reducing the gap between ME communities' aspirations for public transport and the proposed projects of Auckland Council.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses 'storytelling' as a methodology for the Auckland case study investigation. Storytelling provides a platform to explore communities' views and perceptions on a particular policy and project (Sandercock, 2003). Sandercock (2003) argues storytelling helps to understand immigrant values, customs and concerns, ultimately educating professionals and politicians, and potentially becoming a catalyst in setting new policy directions. Narrating stories is beneficial for communities themselves who require local representation at a professional level (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003). Thus storytelling both provides the ability for planners to understand viewpoints and opinions of people who are generally invisible during planning processes, and gives voice to immigrant communities. Storytelling has in the past failed to provide the desired outcomes due to power struggles between different organisations (Flyvbjerg, 1998). However narrating stories and the way stories are communicated generates rich qualitative human-centred information for researchers (Eckstein & Throgmorton, 2003). If narrated stories are supplemented with analytical thinking and data, they can ignite new perspectives on transport planning (Denning, 2001).

The purpose of this research is to explore the public transport needs and aspirations of ME immigrants in Auckland. Two individual's stories were gathered, and a four participant focus group discussion was conducted with ME immigrants to gain insight into their personal experiences of public transport in Auckland. The individuals were strategically selected as representatives of a community association, varying in age, occupation, life stage, gender and country of origin. The selected participants are either Auckland residents or members of the wider ME community who have extensive experience and knowledge of ME community issues and aspirations. Some participants have lived in a number of Auckland suburbs which is useful in revealing a wide range of experiences of public transport services across Auckland. Table 1 provides demographic details of the participants involved in the interviews and focus group.

| Name | Age | Occupation | Period of living in Auckland |
|---------|-----|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ibrahim | 34 | Engineer | 13 years |
| Ahmad | 45 | An executive of ME Association | 1 years |
| Leena | 30 | Mother with one child | 5 years |
| Imaan | 27 | Mother with two small children | 4 years |
| Rania | 21 | University student | 1 year |
| Omar | 44 | Scientist | 22 years |

Table 1: Demographic details of participants

The focus group discussion explored the diverse concerns, aspirations, positive experiences and needs of the ME community regarding public transport. The interviews were conducted in Arabic (the most widely spoken language in the Middle East) to allow participants to easily explain their stories. The primary ethical concern for the interviewing process was cultural sensitivity, however, considering one researcher is of a ME background this ethical concern was easily managed in a culturally-acceptable manner. These stories were recorded, transcribed and then translated. Research questions aimed to allow participants to freely and openly express their opinions on Auckland's public transport. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality. The interviewed participants were asked general questions about their origin, when they migrated to New Zealand and their everyday experiences of using public transport services in Auckland.

3. Middle Eastern community stories of public transport in Auckland

This section documents stories expressed by members of Auckland ME communities regarding their needs and aspirations towards public transport.

a) Ibrahim's story – make public transport reliable

Ibrahim migrated from Kuwait to New Zealand in 1994 and migrated to Auckland some years later at the age of 28. He has spent recent years attaining a tertiary education at the Albany campus of Massey University. As a student, Ibrahim caught buses daily and has wide experiences of public transport services across Auckland. He completed his Bachelor of Engineering in 2008 then went on to post graduate study from 2008 - 2011. During his student years, Ibrahim experienced inefficient bus services. He stated *'it is a whole regional issue but I think in the North Shore it's the worst for getting efficient public transport.'*

Ibrahim believes the North Shore experience the worst bus services due to infrequent services and population dispersal, creating excessive demand on public transport services compared to other areas of Auckland. According to Ibrahim the North Shore bus services are the least reliable due to their inability to cater to the high-frequencies required to transport passengers. He is concerned about the efficiency and convenience of bus services on the North Shore apart from the Northern Busway which is *'fantastic'*. Regarding owning a private vehicle he believes *'you don't have a choice. It's not a luxury, it's a need.'* This statement in itself reflects the views of many Auckland residents who simply feel they have limited alternative transport choices other than to use a car, which continues to create concerns environmentally, economically and socially. It is clear from Ibrahim's facial expression and tone of voice that he believes public transport networks and services need extensive review, change and development. Auckland new public transport network project might help to address Ibrahim's concerns.

Ibrahim explains how he had lived in a number of suburbs in Auckland after migrating from Kuwait partly moving due to the problems he faced with accessibility, and the regularity of bus services. As a university student, accessing a regular bus services was a determining factor in choosing residential location. He found peak-time public transport services to be the least reliable; the mornings when people travel to work and university, and the evenings when people return home. He explains the changing dynamics of Auckland with regard to traffic congestion: *'ages ago traffic jams were only between 8am and 10am and between 5:30pm and 7pm. Now it's between 6:30am and 7pm – almost the whole day, which creates problems for students who want to attend classes at mid-day';.*

When asked if certain circumstances affect one's willingness to use public transport, Ibrahim answered *'yes, if I had a meeting in town I would never catch or depend on the bus to get to the meeting to be on time, it's not reliable at all. For a meeting I would rather withstand the hassle of finding parking then withstand the hassle of not reaching the meeting on time.'* Ibrahim expresses strong opinions on the need for reliable bus services and further reveals the need to develop effective and trustworthy services which will encourage increased public transport patronage.

Due to Ibrahim's international experience of reliable public transport, he carries positive perceptions and a willingness to use public transport. He aspires to an alternative rail-based public transport service as the dominant public transport mode for Auckland. He believes rail-based public transport will reduce road congestion, and supports an electric rail network for Auckland *'I used the underground trains in London which are so so convenient. You literally can travel to any place so that would be amazing if Auckland had something like this.'* This signifies the correlation between positive public transport experiences and one's willingness to use public transport when in new environments.

Ibrahim shows concern over his ability to access information and participate in local matters. He wants the ME community to become more engaged in decision-making processes *'I wish there was something to participate in and for the Council to be more active because currently, based on what they are planning I don't know how they collected their information or data. As a resident we have no access to the information, maybe it is online but I don't know if it's available or not'*. This is an important concern for Ibrahim as he wants to see ME community engagement in planning processes.

b) Ahmad's story – overcoming negative perception of public transport

Ahmad is an executive member of an ME association, and moved to New Zealand in 2003. Initially, he lived in Auckland but then moved around the country to follow his job. However, in his executive member role he remains well-connected to his community. Ahmad thinks *'negative perceptions'* of public transport are the greatest disincentive for the ME community to use buses. Ahmad believes these negative perceptions have developed due to poor experiences of public transport either internationally or in Auckland, creating reluctance in ME communities to use public transport. He notes the ME communities who moved from London, Paris, Singapore and Hong Kong where good quality public transport services are available, have less negative perceptions of public transport *'I definitely think that some people having exposure to internationally successful public transport networks has altered their personal perceptions'*.

To Ahmad, positive or negative perceptions of public transport, formed prior to migration to new environments are a dominant factor in higher or lower public transport usage by ME communities. Considering ME countries are often considered 'third world countries' the cultural perceptions when migrating to New Zealand are to improve quality of life, seen to be facilitated by cars. According to Ahmad the biggest challenge to encouraging ME immigrants to use public transport is *'they have to change their perception about....you see ahhh it's how to change the mentality. It's not that easy, it's not that easy. Because everyone comes to a country like New Zealand expecting to improve their living standards so if they had their own vehicle in the Middle East it would be a major step backwards if they decided to rely on public transport.'* This statement reveals the perception Ahmad and others like him have of public transport due to their inexperience and lack of exposure to good quality public transport networks.

ME immigrants coming to New Zealand, find using public transport difficult especially if they are coming directly from their home country where there is no good quality public transport. Overcoming negative perceptions is essential to increase public transport patronage; Ahmad explains *'psychologically you have that barrier that [by using public transport] I'm going backwards instead of going forward. So this psychological barrier in my opinion is the first one to overcome with Arabs before you persuade them to use public transport'*. Overcoming these challenges can be achieved through positive primary public transport experiences.

Significant concerns over the convenience of public transport in Auckland are also expressed by Ahmad *'I found that bus services were rather unreliable and inconvenient, nothing really beats the convenience element of commuting with your own car ... I just can't count on buses to get me to where I need to go, especially if I have an appointment or I need to be somewhere for work'*. Ahmad's statements illustrate the cultural perceptions immigrants hold when migrating to New Zealand.

c) Focus Group Narratives and Discussion

The stories from the four participant focus group are described below.

Leena – friendly but unreliable public transport: A participant in her early thirties with young children voiced positive personal experiences; *'bus services are very friendly in Auckland'* due to the support shown by bus drivers and passengers, especially when managing a pram and children

on the bus. She also highlights bus reliability issues when commuting from one location to another *'I feel that Auckland bus services lack reliability. When wanting to travel somewhere important and on time I always use my car, it's not worth the risk of catching a bus and arriving late'*. A perception of unreliability supports the need to introduce a reliable alternative public transport mode.

Imaan – make it direct: A participant in her late twenties expressed her willingness to travel using public transport, if direct services are provided in Auckland; *'I've taken buses to visit friends and it was about a 1 hour 45 minute ride. Honestly speaking, it is too much time from point A to B with young children and the unpredictable weather of Auckland. And I'm just mentioning about time, not the cost involved for this journey. As a parent I believe we all try to choose realistic options'*. Imaan's concerns over travel time and the directness of public transport are derived from her need as a mother to conveniently transport herself and her family around Auckland.

Rania – bring in more 'kool' trains: A participant in her early twenties explains her concerns with the uncertainty of bus services *'with buses you get stuck because of traffic, it's not consistent and the timing is not ideal. People need certainty.'* The appropriateness and potential inconveniences of public transport on roads was a central concern for Rania, leading to preference for rail-based public transport services. *'I like trains because they provide a more relaxed and kool travel environment compared to a bus. And because it's a train, the possibility of having an accident compared to a bus is really minimal. For instance if there is an accident on the road such as a car crash, it could directly have an impact on buses and the timing of their services ... I loved trains when I was overseas...you don't get stuck with traffic, with a bus you're on a public road but with a train it's more consistent and reliable time-wise.'* Thus Rania indicates concerns with the timing of public transport services, which is a major concern for public transport users.

Omar – make public transport convenient and attractive: Omar is in his mid-forties and migrated to New Zealand with his wife and two children from Jordan in 1993. Omar frequently used bus services in Jordan when travelling to and from university. He explains as a student in Jordan, using ineffective and unreliable public transport *'wasn't a choice, by any means it wasn't a choice because at that time in my life I was a student and there were limited options for me to travel to university because cars were so expensive in Jordan.'* He further explained *'Back home in Jordan transport infrastructure isn't designed for anything but driving. You can't even actively walk around because footpaths aren't typically provided'*. Convenience is a critical factor for Omar in using his car rather than public transport. *'I choose to use my own car for convenience purposes although I haven't had much experience with public transport in Auckland'*. Concerns regarding the benefits derived from public transport were raised by Omar *'Buses in Auckland aren't attractive. I mean what can a bus provide me that a car can't?'* Omar felt his needs for travel are not currently effectively met by public transport, creating a reluctance to use public transport.

4. DISCUSSING STORY NARRATIVES

Analysis of the collected stories is organised into two main sections; a) ME community experiences and needs and, b) aspirations. Four main themes have been derived from the community's needs for public transport; convenience, reliability and certainty, directness, and awareness of changing perceptions toward public transport. Two main themes have been identified from the community's aspirations; rail-based public transport and proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes.

a) Public transport experiences and needs of the Middle Eastern community

One of the most predominant needs for the ME community is an effective and efficient public transport service in Auckland. These need can be achieved through improving convenience, increasing reliability and certainty, improving travel times and directness, and creating awareness of the changing perceptions of the ME community.

i) Improving convenience: The stories reveal concerns and aspirations for a convenient public transport network which meets need. A general need is expressed for greater availability and efficiency of Auckland's public transport services. However ME communities are concentrated in areas which generally suffer poor public transport coverage. This creates difficulties for community members travelling from one location to another (Preston & Raje, 2007). Reflecting these key themes, Heggie (1978) argues travel behaviours are substantially determined by convenience and accessibility of travel modes. Wider availability of public transport services at off-peak times is a key aspiration for female members of ME communities who want to travel for leisure purposes or for carrying out responsibilities such as picking-up their children from school. Stone, Mees, & Imran (2012) argue greater availability of off-peak public transport provides opportunities to young, ageing and female populations to travel, making transport and cities more inclusive (Sandercock, 2000). Consequently, it is important to widen the Auckland regional public transport network rather than a sole focus on building mega public transport projects in the CBD.

ii) Improving reliability and certainty: Reliability and certainty of public transport services are also major aspirations revealed by different stories. Reliability is linked to timing, accuracy of arrival times and capacity to provide service to passengers (Noland, 1997; Paulley et al., 2006). Despite the concerns expressed by participants, they all aspired to an organised and consistent public transport system, to provide confidence that services can cater to their needs, in terms of timing, quality of service, and availability or reliability. Infrequent services were revealed as a critical factor discouraging participant use of public transport. Unreliable public transport led to individuals choosing private transport (Jakob et al., 2006; Stone et al., 2012). Stories from Rania and Ahmad show willingness to use public transport if services can provide certainty of departure and arrival times. Leena found bus services friendly but preferred to travel by car for appointments rather than risk arriving late due to a lack of bus service reliability and certainty. Ahmad also expressed his lack of confidence in the current public transport network which has discouraged him from using its services. His lack of trust derives from a lack of reliable public transport services. Each of these examples shows a clear need for change in the operational services to maximise public transport patronage. Public transport services which fail to cater to user needs will continue to restrict opportunities to increase public transport patronage (Preston & Raje, 2007), while greater reliability and shorter travel times encourage public transport use and influence travel behaviours and attitudes (Beirao & Cabral, 2007).

iii) Improving travel time and directness compared to cars: Lack of direct public transport routes and long travel times are a major concern of the ME community in Auckland. For instance Ibrahim changed his residential location based on his need for greater access to public transport services, revealing the level of significance public transport can have for users. Frequency, efficiency and reliability are all important aspects of directness in public transport services, deficiencies in these being a major deterrent for ME patrons. A disproportionately long bus journey as compared to car journeys, along with insufficient bus routes ultimately deters participants from using public transport. Cars are seen to be a quicker travel mode because of direct routes, despite the levels of congestion experienced in Auckland (Beirao & Cabral, 2007). Until Auckland public transport exhibits shorter travel times compared to cars, ME communities will have reservations about using public transport. This is shown in Imaan's need for shorter journeys and direct bus service. Directness of services can be achieved by implementing public transport network planning principles (Imran and Matthews 2015) to improve the efficiency of public transport services. While reliability, connectivity and directness are confirmed as being important to non-immigrant populations in Auckland, there is no certainty, due to deep-rooted historical issues and attitudes to public transport, that these potential patrons can be a predictable market for public transport. However, newly arrived immigrant communities can provide a confirmed market for public transport given their higher propensity to use public transport than long-term resident immigrants (Imran, Yin & Pearce.2014, Klocker & Head, 2013).

iv) Awareness of changing negative perception among the ME communities: Public transport is seen by ME communities to have positives and negatives. Most individuals who have had poor experiences of public transport earlier in their lives (whether internationally or locally) hold 'negative perceptions' about public transport in general. In addition, over time ineffective public transport in Auckland has further increased negative community perceptions. Although perception may be seen as an initial barrier to public transport use (Hensher, 1994; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) ME communities are changing their perceptions of public transport through positive experiences. A number of participants state clear distinctions between ME immigrants who have been exposed to effective public transport services worldwide. Ahmad and Ibrahim acknowledge the change in attitudes held by those who have experienced effective public transport in cities such as London, Paris, Singapore and Hong Kong. Positive experiences of public transport can alter negative perceptions held by individuals. Leena conveys her positive experiences with bus services, expressing her appreciation for the cleanliness, seating, lighting, and accessibility of low floors. Positive experiences of service quality and the friendliness of bus drivers support positive attitudes towards public transport, these findings being consistent with Blumenberg & Smart's (2009) research in Southern California. If immigrants first experiences of public transport are positive, an opportunity arises to increase public transport patronage in Auckland. Positive primary experiences may be accomplished through organising events which advertise public transport as an attractive mode, creating excitement and celebrating improvements in public transport services such as the new rail network. Providing complimentary Auckland Transport HOP cards to new immigrants and students could be an effective mechanism for increasing patronage, if those first experiences are positive.

b) Public transport aspirations of the Middle Eastern community

Stories from the ME communities show two main aspirations related to public transport. One aspiration is for a rail-based public transport network to limit the inconveniences of road travel and to improve journey qualities and reliability of services. The second aspiration is for proactive engagement in Auckland's decision making processes.

i) A rail-based public transport network: Attractiveness is an integral component in successfully increasing public transport patronage. When asking Ahmad about the greatest challenge for the ME community in using public transport the answer was simple; changing perception. Ahmad believes negative perceptions and experiences of public transport, whether experienced internationally or locally are dominant factors and barriers in increasing public transport patronage. Ibrahim believes rail-based public transport networks in Auckland are a vital investment in changing the negative perceptions of ME communities. Participants showed significant support for train network electrification. The ME community aspires to an effective rail-based public transport system, unlike the Chinese communities which aspire to effective bus-oriented public transport (Imran, Yin, & Pearce, 2014). Like Paulley et al. (2006) and Fujii, Garling, & Kitamura (2001), the ME community believe a rail network has the ability to provide quick trips compared to cars and buses which have to cope with the congested roads. Rania thinks trains can provide increased journey quality and reliability. Investing in rail-based public transport networks which cater to the needs of users is crucial if public transport patronage is to flourish (Hensher, 1994; Hine & Scott, 2000).

ii) Proactive Engagement in Auckland Decision Making Processes: Ibrahim shows his concern over the lack of effective communication between Council and ME communities regarding policy-making and priority setting. ME communities were not involved in civic decision-making in their countries of origin and have limited knowledge on how to participate in public engagement in Auckland. This creates a reluctance to participate in local matters due to a lack of understanding of the decision making processes. Although multicultural cities provide challenges in planning for diverse cities (Pestieau & Wallace, 2003), diverse cultures, as exhibited by the ME communities provide opportunities for enhanced policy making, as they introduce fresh perspectives and outlooks on current and future planning issues. Enabling community participation in local matters is

important in creating inclusive cities (Qadeer, 1997; Sandercock, 2000).

There appears to be a lack of communication between Auckland Transport and ethnic communities regarding priority setting for public transport. Despite official information being available online, community members feel they do not know where to access information, or how to influence the decision-making processes, and raise their concerns. This signifies a lack of understanding and awareness around opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Gathering narratives of communities such as ME communities is essential in creating more inclusive transport planning systems where experiences, needs and aspirations can be explored (Burayidi, 2003; Sandercock, 2003). Exploring experiences of public transport by ME immigrants provides a window on the aspirations held for greater public engagement and opportunities for public involvement, which currently lack expression at social or political scales.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research is to explore ME community needs and aspirations for public transport in Auckland. The stories of ME community reveal key concerns regarding improving convenience, reliability and certainty, improving travel times and the directness of public transport services in Auckland. The research shows a number of participants have negative perceptions of public transport due to their negative past experiences, whether in their countries of origin or in Auckland. However, community members are willing to utilise public transport if Auckland develops a good quality rail-based public transport system as seen in cities such as London, Hong Kong and Singapore. The research shows there is a need to understand cultural perceptions of public transport among different communities, and to exploit the willingness of recent immigrants to use public transport, with the ME community represents a young and growing demographic in Auckland. The research highlights the importance of innovative ideas and planning tools to cater to the needs and aspirations of diverse ethnic communities. Although transport planning is a major focus for Auckland, multicultural transport planning should be further developed to cater to the increasingly diverse communities created through mass immigration, as successfully shown by Vancouver. Formal consultation fails to protect and project immigrant needs and aspirations in the planning realm. Thus, only when effective policies and practises are created and efficiently implemented, will New Zealand thrive in creating innovative and coherent multicultural transport planning policies.

Transport policies will greatly benefit from incorporating the distinct needs of immigrant communities in Auckland. Auckland's population is rapidly changing and there is a need to approach transport planning from innovative angles and perspectives. The research reveals members of the ME community have pre-conceived perceptions of public transport and require positive experiences in order to encourage increased patronage. Positive public transport experiences can only be achieved through public transport networks which meet needs and aspirations, which can in turn only be achieved through development of effective policies. Positive attitudes were expressed towards a rail-based public transport network rather than buses. Therefore by gathering data on the ME community regarding their needs and aspirations for the future of Auckland, public transport planning and policies can become more inclusive, and foster inclusive and varied mechanisms of communication, further improving the efficacy and implementation of public transport policies. More inclusive and innovative approaches to public transport planning are required if a change in attitudes towards Auckland's public transport is to be achieved. Thus, by exploring the needs and aspirations of individual communities, a greater understanding of what planning tools and transport policies will be appropriate for public transport in Auckland can be achieved. Future research should study and seek to understanding the correlation between positive public transport experiences and changes in perception. This is integral in understanding the cultural aspects involved in immigrant travel behaviours, which can then be utilised to help increase public transport patronage.

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