

Opinion

Pesky pylons a vulgar sight



Laura
Wallace

I have a confession to make.

I hate the power pylons on the Desert Rd.

I will admit that this hatred began as an unfounded, ill-informed and possibly irrational

dislike of Transpower, their predecessors and governmental counterparts for plonking such revolting metal things in the middle of a place of total beauty.

This hatred now stems from the fact that it seems virtually impossible to convince anyone, Transpower or otherwise, that burying the power cables is a sensible option.

Last month, I started a survey of people in the hope that I could get enough consensus to start a serious "bury the cables" campaign in the National Park area.

Alas, no-one seemed to share my vehemence, although there were some mutterings of support from the people down south.

It seems that no-one is willing to support my cause. Or even take it seriously.

What I didn't realise is that the burial of the power cables is a hell of a lot more costly than everyone really knows.

Because...

The tall and ugly metal pylons are cooled by the natural winds they come in contact with, thus keeping the power lines at a temperature that ensures they do not fry and cause a major outage.

When the cables are buried, they are insulated by the earth, which posed a serious problem for the clever people at Transpower. This insulating earth meant that the power cables needed a way to be cooled.

Some intelligent scientist, somewhere, came up with the solution. The buried cables needed to be installed into a cooling chamber which simulates the type of winds and the temperature that the power lines mounted on a pylon come in contact with. This tunnel ensures that the cables are cool and well protected from water damage.

However, what the people who came up with the solution didn't think of was that it would cost more than the pylon option. A lot more.

By the time Transpower have paid the contractors to dig the trench, made the parts for the cooling chamber and installed the chamber, and then run the lines, the taxpayer is paying a lot more in electrical bills. This leads to unhappy, but possibly warmer, taxpayers.

But it is not only the taxpayer who seems ambivalent about the whole issue. Not so long ago, I was speaking to Paul Wheatcroft at the Ruapehu District Council.

When I asked him whether the council had considered lobbying Transpower to bury the cables, I think he thought I was more than a little bit bizarre.

Although he could not speak on behalf of the entire council, he said they had not discussed the issue.

Apparently, Ruapehu council and Transpower are more concerned about the possibility of a lahar from the mountain wiping out the powerlines!

I did point out that if the power lines were buried, then the lahar would run straight over them and no-one in the area would lose power. This is something that also hasn't been thought about.

Another person, who didn't really have a desire to see her name in print, pointed out that digging a trench across National Park would probably upset all the



PHOTO: LAURA KNIGHT

PHOTO-OP LOST: Pylons on the Desert Rd spoil the scenic vista.

green-fingered wee people over at the Department of Conservation.

According to her, DoC has been "conservationising" the tussock grass on the green space between State Highway 1 and the mountain, and digging a trench would disturb all the grass.

The same person said she would rather see the money used to preserve the existing environment. Spoilsport.

Another person who manages to have an opinion on the subject is the illustrious Peter Jackson.

According to a source, which of course I am not going to reveal, being a scrupulous and moralistic journalism student, Jackson has said that if the second line of

pylons goes ahead, the New Zealand film industry will collapse.

Scottish film-makers have been coming out to New Zealand because there are not enough pylon-free spaces in Scotland where they want to shoot. If we bury the pylons, we bring in more money from the cinematographers.

So in the red corner, on the "for removal, burial, or otherwise" side, we have me, some random people, film-makers and HALT (Homeowners Against Line Trespassers).

And in the blue corner, on the "against removal, burial or otherwise" side, we have Transpower,

the government, the taxpayer and the Department of Conservation. It is shaping up to be a very, very unfair fight.

But imagine how many more tourists would stop to photograph the scenic vista if the landscape was not spoiled by gigantic grey metal things that look they were either dropped from outer space, or being used by some random sci-fi film-maker in the newest version of 'Children of the Dune'.

However, I also imagine that if more tourists stopped to take photos of the mountain, someone, somewhere, would complain that they were causing a traffic hazard. Apparently, you can't keep everyone happy.

Can't feel the serenity? Try copper



Craig
Borley

Traffic in Auckland is as slow, cluttered and expensive as our archaic internet services. Our bungling public transport is no better.

Opinion on the solution seems split into two camps. One sees the answer as building more motorways. The other: to invest in public transport.

But there is a smaller, quieter group, often ignored as utopian, far-fetched and ungrounded. It's the working-from-home-solves-all-our-problems group. And I'm a convert.

I decided one morning last week the day was too beautiful to spend time lane changing in motorway traffic, or jammed in a noisy, stuffy bus. Instead, I opted for the serenity and efficiency of the Devonport ferry.

Living nowhere near Devonport presented an obvious hurdle. But I figured a short burst down the motorway to the off

ramp wouldn't hurt too much.

From there it would be plain sailing, so to speak. But it doesn't work like that in Auckland.

The motorway was predictably slow, that much I could handle. But when the off ramp was blocked by road works, things began to sour.

The obligatory rat-runners appeared, zipping past in the other lane and then, with oh-so-surprised expressions, switching lanes at the last minute.

The temptation to block them was tempered by a fear of being stuck in slow moving traffic with someone behind me shaking their fist.

The next 10 minutes were peppered with red lights - where queues of cars waited two minutes as one inconsiderate driver pulled out of a side road.

Finally, with a revealing splash of brickwork and blue sea, Devonport appeared around the bend, serene in her old clothes, elegantly awaiting my arrival.

But the old lady had woken up on the wrong side of the bed.

The ferry runs regularly, a commend-

able trait, but its patronage is such that there were no parks. None.

Devonport sneered at my panic. I ended up closer to North Head than the wharf, and ran, flustered, bag on shoulder, scarf trailing.

With a minute to spare I entered the run-down terminal. The ferry was 15 minutes late.

It finally docked as the next boat, due at the same time, bore down from behind.

A rabble of fevered commuters tumbled on to the first ferry, before it pulled away prematurely to allow the second ferry in.

The net result - arriving 20 minutes late to the city - was met with typical Auckland transport behaviour.

Arrogance.

No explanation, no apology, no smile from the man who took my money.

I trudged up Queen St, sucking in long breathes of poisonous car emissions and secondhand tobacco smoke, considering Auckland's task: to fix, really fix, our transport woes. Auckland can do it. Yeah, right.

But we can fix our broadband.

And cheap, fast broadband means working from home would be a real alternative for many. Think of the time we could save each morning, and the grey hairs we could postpone.

In that moment, I was converted. I went straight to the bookshop and bought an internet magazine. I understood none of it, but I felt proactive.

Who would have thought, the answer to Auckland's traffic woes lies not in the laying of tracks or roads, but in tiny copper wires.

NZ Broadband Update

Faster, cheaper broadband is being unleashed by Xtra on October 26.

The upgrade comes after the Government ordered Telecom to unbundle the wires to allow competition between broadband servers.

Slingshot, Orcon, TelstraClear, Xtra and Quicksilver now have an opportunity to open up the broadband market.