

NZ CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Te Huia: Should WorkSafe investigate? Did political pressure compromise safety?

The Waikato Chamber of Commerce has called on WorkSafe to investigate the circumstances that led to Waka Kotahi banning the Te Huia train from operating on Auckland's metro rail network. And questioned whether political pressure had played a part in the situation.

The temporary ban follows two 'Signal Passed at Danger (SPAD) incidents reported by Kiwi Rail. A SPAD event is defined as an incident when the train driver failed to obey a red signal and has entered a section of track where there is the potential for conflict with another rail service.

The ban means Te Huia's route, which usually terminates at The Strand in Parnell, would instead terminate at Papakura and passengers would then be bussed to Parnell.

Waikato Chamber CEO Don Good called for WorkSafe to investigate the incidents. He also queried whether [political pressure resulted in the safety concerns](#).

Back in August 2021, Hamilton City councillors were discussing whether to allow Auckland to take more water from the Waikato River. Then councillor and long-time Te Huia support Dave Macpherson put forward an amendment which was voted on unanimously.

"That amendment was that Auckland could have more of our water, but that Te Huia must be let into Auckland as part of the deal... basically that staff were to put Te Huia into negotiations with Auckland Council over the deal."

At the time, councillors said they were being blocked by Auckland Transport which was concerned an additional train on the network would further add to its congestion.

"The following month, [it was announced that Te Huia would be allowed to terminate at The Strand](#).

"What I want to know is whether the strong-arming by politicians was the catalyst for compromising passenger safety. Did Auckland Transport relent so Watercare would be allowed to take more Waikato River water? And if so, did they then not do their due diligence to establish whether Te Huia was properly equipped to access the network?"

The first incident is said to have occurred three weeks ago when Te Huia passed a stop signal near Penrose. Another incident this week saw it overrun a signal north of Hamilton.

An Electronic Train Protection (ETP) system on Te Huia was installed. Waka Kotahi would now require European Train Control System (ETCS) technology be installed if Te Huia was to continue operating in the Auckland metro area.

ETCS is a safety system used by Auckland Transport trains which causes them to slow when approaching a red signal. KiwiRail plans to install that, but it will take more than 12 months to complete.

“Should Te Huia have had the right safety system installed before it was granted access to the Auckland metro network? If indeed it should have ETCS technology on board and passenger safety was compromised because it didn’t, then we need to understand how that was allowed to happen through an independent WorkSafe process.

“Te Huia has had too much political meddling. The travelling public both on the service and also in Auckland need to be independently reassured that it is a safe service.

“Te Huia’s passenger numbers dropped in May and June with figures of 5707 and 5813 respectively after having good months in March of 7120 and April 6692; indeed Te Huia’s March result was the second highest ever for the service. It would be a shame not to see it run its full trial for which it is funded until the end of June 2024 to see if it really could be a viable service long-term.”

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