



New Zealand government denies financial assistance for Overlander September 25, 2006

The New Zealand government today has announced that they will not provide financial assistance to the Overlander train service between Auckland and Wellington, which is set to stop service on September 30, if no assistance is forthcoming. ONTRACK will retain the North Island main trunk line, while looking for tourism operators to start a tourist rail service.

Trevor Mallard, acting Finance Minister, said: "In making this decision... Cabinet recognised that there was no prospect of the current Overlander service becoming commercially viable. It was not a fuel-efficient operation and at an average passenger rate of 50 passengers each way per day, it was used by relatively few people."

It is cheaper and faster to travel either by bus or plane rather than the 12-hour train journey. "The fares already overlap with airfares, and the reality is that the service is just not well-used. It can not compete with low-priced air travel and coaches. Cabinet considered the regional implications of ceasing the Overlander service and accepted that the current bus services run by the InterCity Group met the needs of those communities," Mallard said.

There has been numerous petitions from the public and from the Green

Party of New Zealand to continue the Overlander train service, including one petition signed by 16,000 people presented at the Parliament Buildings on September 14, 2006. "While there have been a number of propositions about retaining the Overlander service, all of the propositions would require government funding in one form or another," said Mallard.

Mallard said that the government will only support rail services if it significantly benefitted the community.

The Government estimates that financial assistance to the Overlander train service would cost NZ\$1.75 million a year.

"Finally, the government does recognise and value the importance of a viable and efficient rail network in New Zealand's transport infrastructure. This was a critical factor in the government's decision to buy the rail network back from Tranz Rail. The government has also committed \$200 million to upgrade the national rail network between 2004/05 and 2007/08. A further \$600 million has been provided to upgrade the Auckland rail network between 2005/06 and 2009/10."

CoolBrands: New Zealand coolest place in the world September 26, 2006

New Zealand has been voted the coolest place in the world by United Kingdom brand: CoolBrands.

Coolbrands is owned by a consultancy firm in the UK, called Superbrands. It started in 2001, CoolBrands is a way of telling how 'cool' a brand is. Superbrands defines "brands that have become extremely desirable among many style leaders and influencers. They have a magic about them, signifying that users have an exceptional sense of taste and style."

George Hickton, chief executive of Tourism New Zealand, said: "This win is a vindication of the recent work we've put in to the UK market, with the Chelsea Flower Show and our 100% Pure New Zealand advertising campaign ensuring New Zealand stays top of mind with potential travellers."

"It's very gratifying to see we are such a desirable destination, especially as this poll includes opinion leaders who can have an real influence on people's travel choices." says Mr Hickton. "this is the second award New Zealand has received in the UK this September, with Conde Nast Traveller magazine also voting New Zealand best destination this month."

Editor of Condé Nast Traveler Magazine, Sarah Miller, called New Zealand a "point of authenticity." And professional nation brander, Wally Olin, said "New Zealand has been very, very clever. It has turned its disadvantages into advantages."

"Reaping the benefits of its recent marketing campaign, New Zealand is apparently the hottest place to be," said

the London News.

650 brands were chosen by researchers which were then put before 23 judges and were made available for the public, of which 1,725 people participated in an online survey. Five percent of the original 650 made it to the finals, including Morocco, Maldives and Australia.

New Zealand receives most of its tourists from Australia, closely followed by the UK.

The top ten destinations included:

1. New Zealand
2. Morocco
3. Fiji
4. Prague
5. Australia
6. Maldives
7. Amsterdam
8. Brighton
9. Bahamas
10. Bermuda

TVNZ wins court battle to screen Rainbow Warrior court footage September 27, 2006

New Zealand broadcast company, Television New Zealand (TVNZ), has won a 20 year court battle to show court footage of Alain Mafart and Dominique Prieur pleading guilty to the manslaughter of photographer, Fernando Pereira during the 1985 bombing of Greenpeace ship the Rainbow Warrior. The Supreme Court dismissed the pair's request of appeal and has ordered that they pay NZ\$2,500 to TVNZ.

The Supreme Court said: "The pair pleaded guilty to manslaughter in 1985 in circumstances hard to imagine ever

being repeated in this country."

TVNZ had originally won the rights to screen the footage on August 7, 2006 after the Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal made by the French Secret Service. A lawyer acting on behalf of Mafart and Prieur stopped TVNZ from rebroadcasting the footage.

TVNZ say they are "overjoyed at the result."

Bill Ralston, head of news and current affairs for TVNZ, said: "It has been an incredibly long and dogged fight to bring these pictures to the public. This is a significant triumph for media freedom and hopefully demonstrates to the French (and any other Government, corporate or individual) that the New Zealand media will not be intimidated into submission by legal stonewalling. Best of all, a whole new generation of New Zealanders will now get to be eyewitness to a pivotal moment in our country's history."

TV One, owned by TVNZ, will screen the footage on October 1, 2006 on Sunday.

New Zealand Reserve Bank phone hacker unpunished September 28, 2006

Gerasimos Macridis, 39-years-old, left the court room discharged without conviction after hacking into the New Zealand Reserve Bank's phone system and then asking for money for his services after pointing out these security flaws to both the Reserve Bank and Telecom New Zealand in May, 2006, and offering to fix them. He had identified himself as a security consultant.

The New Zealand Police then raided his home and took his computer on 21 September. Macridis told police that he did not think it was illegal, but knew he was not authorised to access the phone systems. Telecom then took

him to court.

Colin McGilicray, police prosecutor, said: "Macridis has a significant number of previous fraud convictions and it appeared he was trying to obtain money through virtue of his technical knowledge."

Macridis, who represented himself, told the court that for 11-years he had worked as a casual security consultant and he had worked for Telecom, police and Department of Internal Affairs.

Macridis thought himself as an honest, law abiding citizen as his 1994 conviction had 'turned his life around'.

Judge Ian Mill said this case was very unusual and also noted that Macridis ended his offending over 10-years ago.

Mill said: "Macridis used his talents to identify security risks and he had identified a grave risk to the Reserve Bank and its customers. Macridis provided a report of his findings, requested payment albeit without a contract and for his troubles was prosecuted. He did not pass the information on to others and did not use it for personal gain."

"In my view his intentions were honourable," Mill added.

Mill discharged him without conviction on the basis that a conviction would be out of proportion with his actions.

Toll New Zealand announces that the Overlander train service will stay September 28, 2006

Toll New Zealand has announced that it will keep the Overlander train service but on a reduced timetable, the service was initially due to stop service September 30. Toll said that they reached the decision because of the huge amount of public support the

train service received, including a 16,000 person petition.

The Overlander will originally run for only three days a week; Friday, Saturday and Sunday during winter on the original timetable. But during summer through to autumn the service will run seven days a week. Toll hopes that this will cover all the needs of its patrons.

David Jackson, Toll NZ CEO, said: "We have had tremendous support from the regional councils and will consider an upgraded service option and offering alternate packages aimed at both domestic users and the tourist market."

Jackson said: "The continuation of the Overlander allows Toll to look at other funding options. We want to explore options that may be open to us to achieve this with the support and input of various interested parties. We especially appreciate the support of the regions to assist with marketing."

The decision comes days after the New Zealand Government announced that they will not provide financial assistance.

"Over the next few weeks we will be speaking to key people with the aim being of putting in place a clear plan for the positive development of the Overlander. Clearly it cannot remain in its current format so change will be fundamental for its survival. Reducing the services will allow us to perform refurbishments on the existing carriages and it [is] expected that this work will be completed by the start of the summer season."

Sue Morris, district mayor for Ruapehu, said: "The decision to save the Overlander is a relief. It's hugely important, it's our future. We are relying on the train to continue for a tourist option here, we're about tour-

sim in the Ruapehu District, it's about bringing 13,000 passengers here."

The Manning Group has a proposal out for electro-diesel trains running two times a day and stopping eight times between Auckland and Wellington. Tom Manning said: "[I am] pleased Toll is looking at upgrading options for the Overlander and I am still open to working with the company to bring better trains to the network."

Filmmaker Peter Jackson to make Xbox games September 29, 2006

New Zealand filmmaker, Peter Jackson and screenwriter Fran Walsh announced at the X06 convention, Wednesday, that they are teaming up with Microsoft to create Xbox and Xbox 360 games with their new company, Wingnut Interactive.

Wingnut Interactive will initially create another video game based on sci-fi series Halo with help from Microsoft and Bungie Studios, but staffed locally in Wellington. His second project can be whatever he likes, while trying to bring new people into the world of gaming.

Peter Jackson spoke to New Zealand news broadcaster, 3 News and said: "I want to be able to experiment with ways of telling stories that's not using the structure of a movie. It's immersive and interactive, but it goes beyond (today's) games. It's what we've been looking forward to for 10 years. I'm sure it will start small and if things go well it will expand to fit whatever this turns into."

Simon McCallum, computer scientist from the University of Otago, said: "For the new company to succeed it would probably need to employ a mix of industry veterans and about 20 or

30 top computer science graduates. However, at the moment New Zealand would struggle to fill any new jobs. In the past two years demand for computer science graduates had tripled while supply had halved."

The New Zealand Game Developers Association said around 140 people work in the development of video games in New Zealand. They say the industry is worth between NZ\$8 million and \$10 million each year. "There is a lot of potential to do something very very big and something very revolutionary. We'll just have to see what happens when the game comes out in a few years time, whether they deliver on that," said Mario Wynands, from the New Zealand Game Developers Association.

David Mclean, director of Australia and New Zealand Xbox, said: "The whole ten billion dollar video games business will be looking at New Zealand and what Peter Jackson produces. There is no release date yet, because Jackson will take as long as necessary to ensure the games meet his exacting standards."

Kerry Prendergast, mayor of Wellington said: "The venture's potential boost to Wellington's economy is enormous. Certainly the early advice I have is that it is worth millions of dollars and more jobs in our city."

Peter Jackson is the producer for the movie version of Halo which is to be shot next year, in Wellington. Jackson also worked with Ubisoft to produce the King Kong video game.

Jackson said: "Xbox has fundamentally changed how people think about games. My vision, together with Microsoft Game Studios, is to push the boundaries of game development and the future of interactive entertainment."

Microsoft also announced at X06 that it is releasing a HD-DVD addon for the Xbox 360, which will come bundled with a free HD-DVD version of King Kong for a limited time only.

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