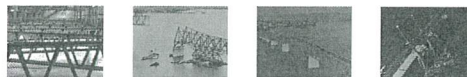
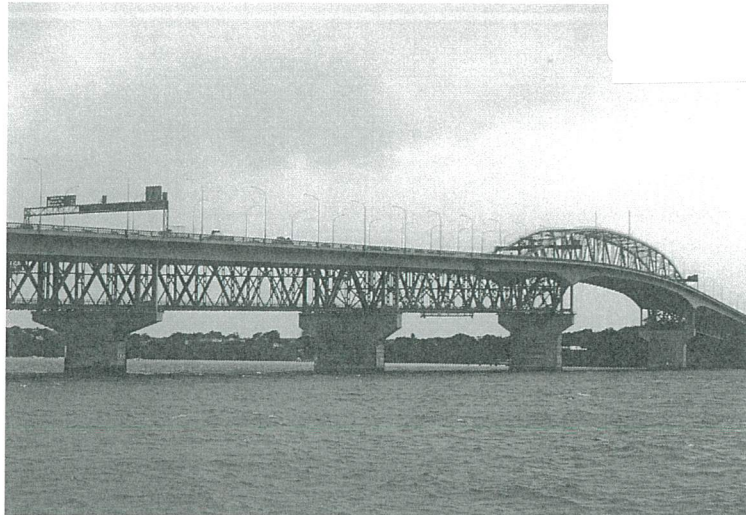


Auckland Harbour Bridge McLean, 2013



Auckland Harbour Bridge (1959 & 1969)

Auckland's driving force

The Auckland Harbour Bridge picked up where the ferries left off. There was talk of a bridge across the Waitematā as early as 1860 and again between the wars, but the planners and politicians gave the green light only in 1946 when they made it central to the new motorway system they fondly believed would solve Auckland's transport problems. The Westhaven reclamation at the southern end began in 1951.

For most of its history the Auckland Harbour Bridge has been a victim of its own success. The intended five lanes were reduced to four to save money. It opened on 30 May 1959 and in its first year averaged 13,493 cars a day, a shock for planners who had predicted 8250 a day by 1965. Between 1967 and 1969 the bridge was widened by adding two Japanese-designed dual-lane steel box extensions to its outside. The so-called 'Nippon clip-ons' bought some time but demand kept outpacing capacity. Traffic jams on the bridge even drove some people back to the ferries. The average daily flows of 80,000 vehicles in 1970 doubled to 165,000 by 2000.

You can now pay to walk above the bridge, but the Birkenhead ferry provides a cheaper way of admiring this Auckland icon. Impressive though its piers and gantries may be, the bridge's real legacy is the vast suburban sprawl on the North Shore. In 1958 it took 40 minutes to travel from Birkdale to the city. In 1960 that fell to just over 15 minutes, shattering the peace of people such as Frank Sargeson. No wonder the Shore took off! And no wonder the authorities are debating plans for tunnels or a second bridge while commuters daily scan cyberspace for warnings of congestion or weather-related delays.

Further information

This site is item number 98 on the History of New Zealand in 100 Places list.

Websites

- Auckland Harbour Bridge historic images - Archives NZ
- Today In History: Auckland Harbour Bridge opens - NZ History
- Roadside Story (video)
- Notable bridges - Te Ara
- NZ Transport Agency
- IPENZ Engineering Heritage

Book

- Renée Lang, *Auckland Harbour Bridge: 50 years of a city icon*, Random House, Auckland, 2009

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