Secondary teachers' and students' travel to school in the context of rising fuel costs

PPTA Te Wehengarua

April 2026

PPTPPTA | PO BOX 2119, WELLINGTON 6140 | P. +64 4 384 9964 | E. ENQUIRIES@PPTA.ORG.NZ
FILE NUMBER: AA2/10/40

Table of Contents

At a Glance

- The Government says it doesn't want schools moving to online learning, even if the fuel situation gets much worse.
- PPTA Te Wehengarua wants to avoid that kind of disruption for students and teachers too, but we must be realistic about the pressures we're facing and what the Government would need to do for face-to-face learning to remain viable.
- An important first step is to understand the situation we are facing.

Teachers' travel

- There has been no data available on teacher travel – until now.
- Over 6,000 teachers rapidly responded to a PPTA Te Wehengarua survey about their travel arrangements.
- 89% of teachers travel to and from school in a car or some other private motor vehicle.
- 70% of private motor vehicles use petrol, 11% use diesel vehicles and 13% are petrol hybrids.
- The average distance travelled by teachers is 17.4 km each way, or 174 km a week.
- But in the most extreme cases, some teachers are travelling 1,000 km a week.
- 41% of teachers say that fuel costs contribute 'hugely' or 'significantly' as a source of financial pressure, with teachers who travel longer distances tending to feel greater pressure.
- Teachers teaching in smaller and more remote settlements, in schools facing greater challenges as measured by the Equity Index, and kaupapa Māori education settings tended to travel greater distances and face greater financial pressures.
- 79% of teachers (who weren't already using public transport) don't consider that public transport is potentially an option for them in getting to and from school.
- Not only is public transport a solution for only a small proportion of teachers, it is also not well-aligned with those teachers who are most vulnerable to the fuel crisis.
- Teachers who work across a range of different schools are more likely (54%) to say that that fuel costs contribute 'hugely' or 'significantly' as a source of financial pressure.
- More than half of the teachers who travel the longest distances (51km or more) teach at schools in cities or larger towns, and nearly half the schools in the country have at least one teacher from this category.

Students' travel

- Based on Census 2023 data, 10-14 year olds (and 15-19 year olds) are much more likely to travel in a private motor vehicle than by bus or to travel by foot or cycle.
- School bus use is more prevalent in smaller settlements, but private vehicles remain the dominant mode.
- Only 7% of students live in area where it would be even slightly realistic for bus services to scale up enough to substantially reduce reliance on cars.

Section 1: Introduction

Fuel prices are reaching historically high levels and security of supply feels increasingly precarious. The international situation is becoming more volatile by the day.

The Government says it doesn't want schools moving to online learning, even if the fuel situation gets much worse. PPTA Te Wehengarua wants to avoid that kind of disruption for students and teachers too, but we must be realistic about the pressures we're facing and what the Government would need to do for face-to-face learning to remain viable.

An important first step is to understand the situation we are facing. There is data available on students' travel patterns from the 2023 Census, but it is not widely known about. There has been no data available on teacher travel – until now.

At the end of March 2026 PPTA Te Wehengarua urgently went out to its members with a short Pulse Check survey about teachers' travel to and from school. We received a strong and rapid response. Over 6,000 teachers provided information about their travel arrangements (about half of them within the first few hours that the survey was open) to help ensure that Government planning for the fuel crisis can be well-informed.

The survey also asked teachers to identify their school, which has allowed us to connect the responses to information about school characteristics from the Ministry of Education's school directory. This has formed the basis for the findings to be analysed in terms of factors like: school geographic category and level of isolation, Equity Index bands, and Kaupapa Māori affiliation.

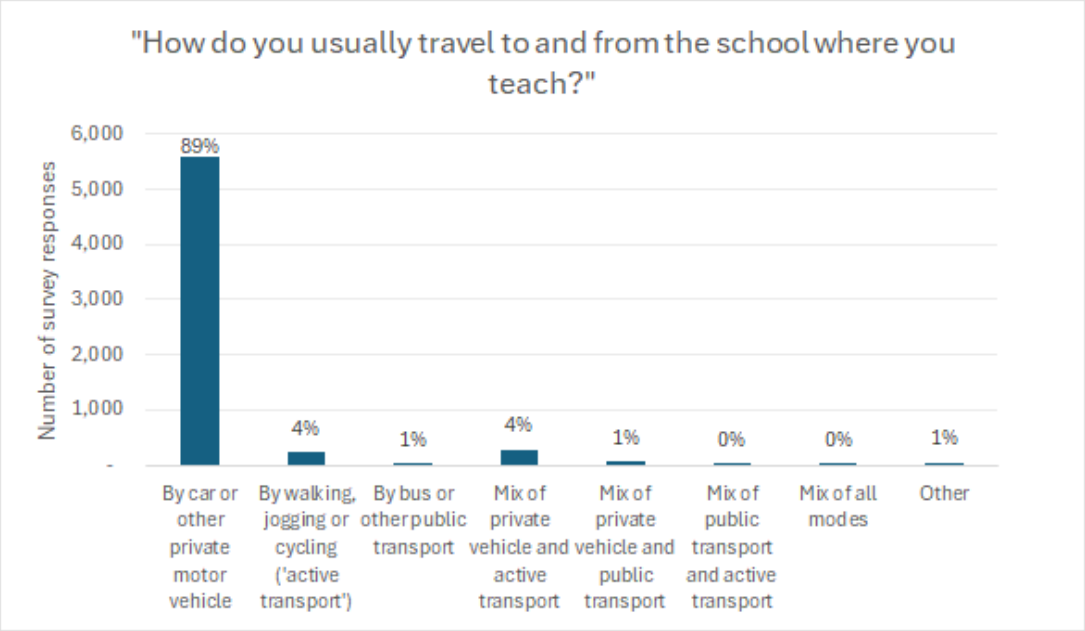
Questions asked	Number of responses
How do you usually travel to and from the school where you teach? Is public transport potentially an option for you in getting to and from school? What kind of fuel does the private motor vehicle you travel in use? How far from your home is the school where you teach? What school do you teach at?	6,298

Section 2: Teachers' travel

The starting point for any plan to maintain face-to-face learning is for teachers to be able to make it to school and back each day. Our survey of teachers has shed light on teachers' travel arrangements. It identifies how much private motor vehicle use is central to putting teachers in front of classrooms, and that there is limited scope to change this.

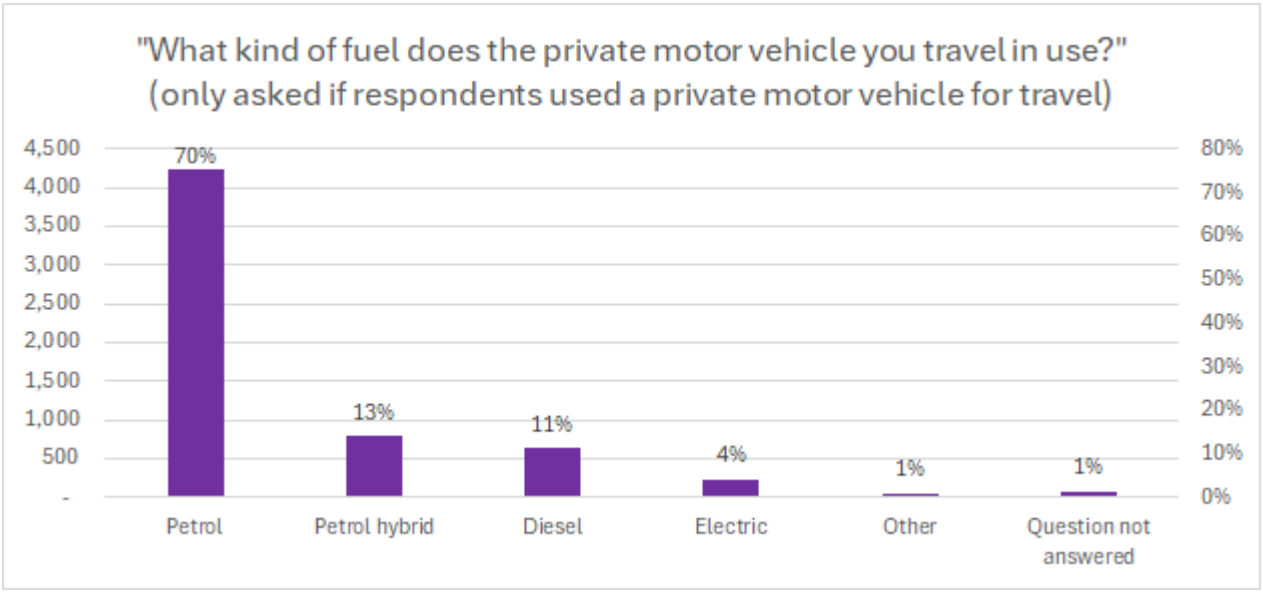
Mode of transport

Figure 1



Teachers overwhelmingly reported that they travelled to and from school in a car or some other private motor vehicle. 94% of respondents used this mode, either exclusively (89%) or in combination with other modes such as public transport (1%) or active transport (walking, jogging or cycling) (4%) (Figure 1).

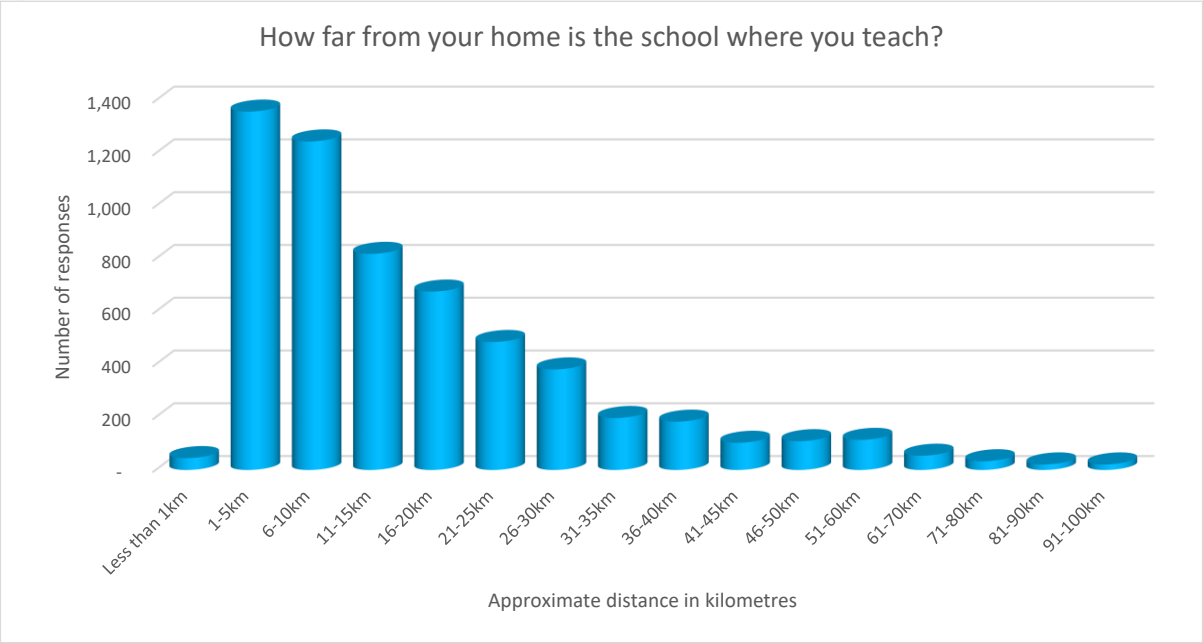
Figure 2



The vehicles that teachers travelled in mainly used petrol (70%). However, there was some use of diesel vehicles (11%) and petrol hybrids (13%). Not many teachers (4%) used pure electric vehicles (Figure 2).

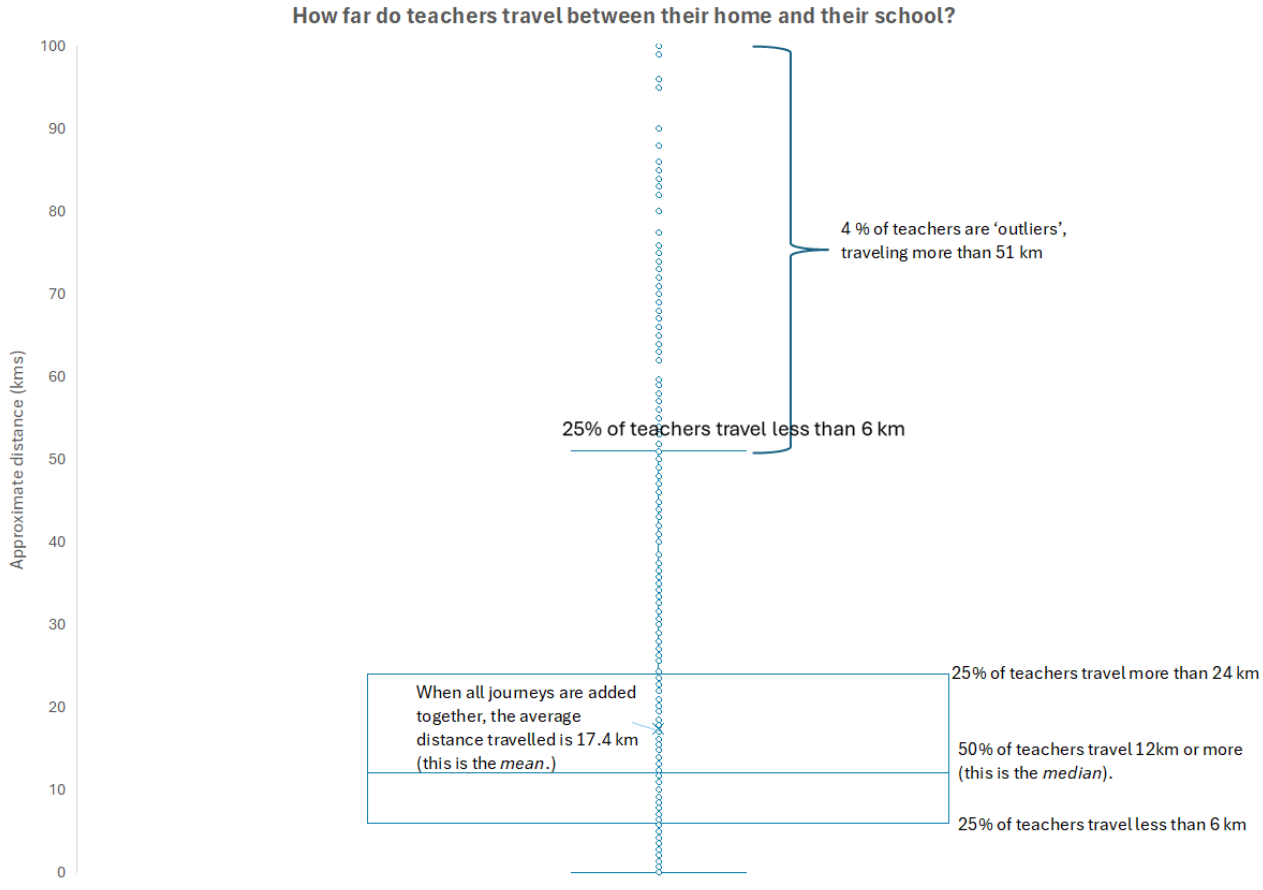
Distance travelled

Figure 3



Teachers were asked the distance between their home and the school where they were teaching. Responses ranged from less than 1 kilometre (km) to 100km. 45% of responses were between 1km and 10km but there was a long tail (Figure 3). The characteristic of this pattern can be presented visually using what is called a 'box and whiskers' diagram.

Figure 4



Each box and whiskers Figure in this report will include a table with the following information:

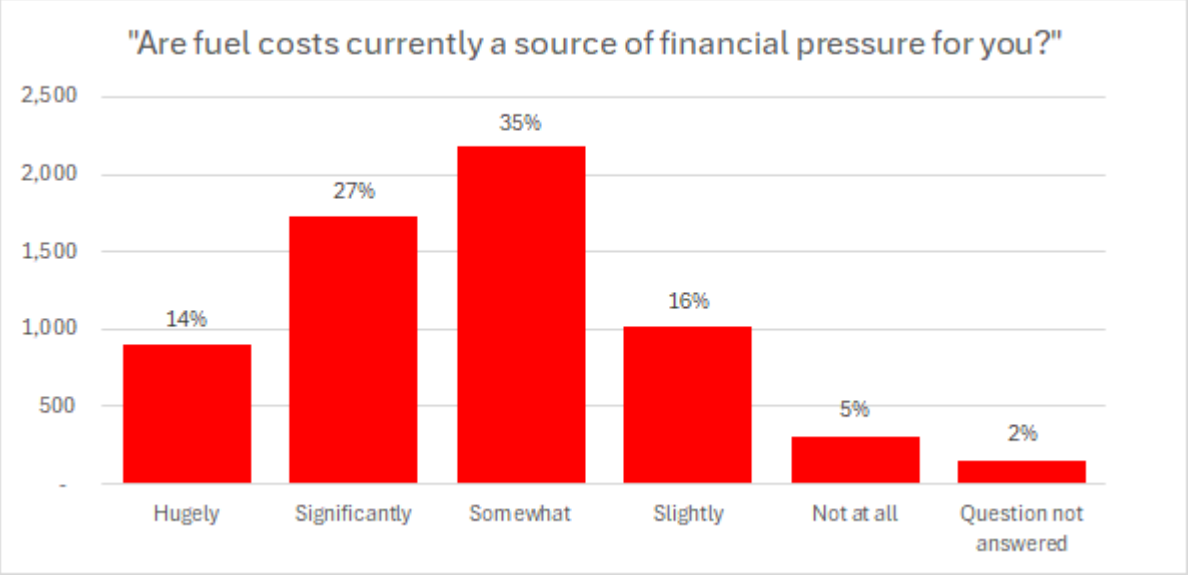
Minimum: 0 km	Maximum: 100 km
Lower Quartile: 6 km	Upper Quartile: 24 km
Median: 12 km	**Mean: 17.4 km**

The average distance travelled by teachers in the survey was 17.4 km each way. That equates to 35 km a day or 174 km a week. But in the most extreme cases, some teachers were travelling 1,000 km a week (Figure 4).

One survey respondent who travelled 70km to school estimated that their fuel costs had already jumped by $25 a week from $45 to $70.

Fuel costs as a source of financial pressure

Figure 5



At present prices, fuel costs are a source of financial pressure to most teachers, but to a varying extent. 41% say that fuel costs contribute 'hugely' or 'significantly' while 35% feel that they contribute 'somewhat'. One in five teachers (21%) currently feel that fuel costs contribute only 'slightly' or 'not at all' to their financial pressures (Figure 5)

These responses are, of course, significantly influenced by the mode of transport a teacher uses, and, for private vehicle users, the type of fuel used (Table 1).

Table 1 Financial pressure by mode of transport and type of fuel used

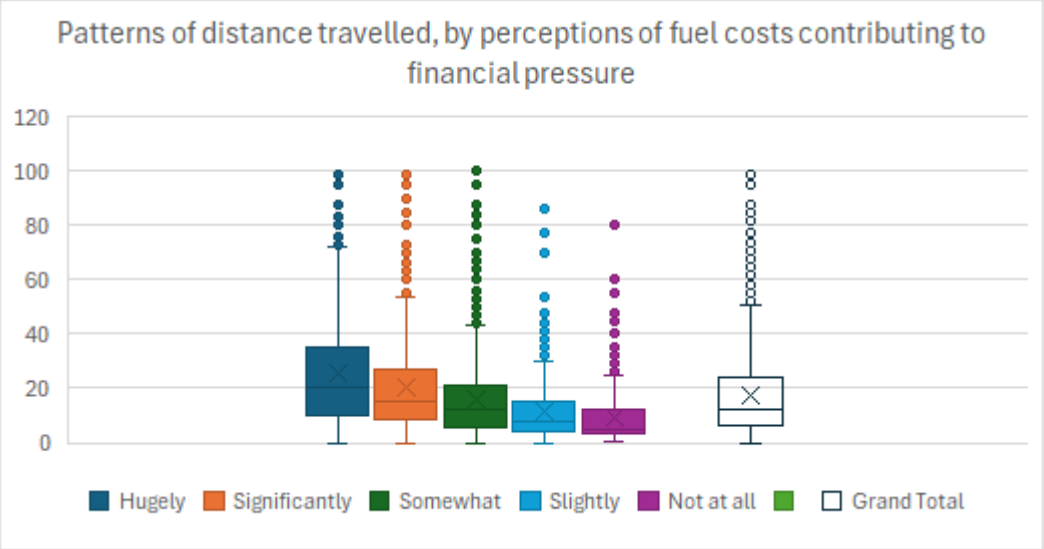
	Mode of transport			Type of fuel used			
	Travelled by car/private vehicle	Used 'active transport'	Used public transport	Vehicle uses petrol	Vehicle uses diesel	Vehicle is a hybrid	Vehicle is electric
Hugely	15%	4%	3%	15%	24%	9%	1%
Significantly	29%	9%	12%	30%	33%	24%	5%
Somewhat	35%	30%	27%	35%	32%	40%	24%
Slightly	15%	28%	27%	15%	9%	21%	28%

If we focus on the (large majority of) teachers who are private vehicle users, the proportion saying that fuel costs contribute 'hugely' or 'significantly' of financial pressure rises from 41% to 44%.

When fuel use is taken into account, that figure rises again slightly to 45% for petrol users and more substantially to 56% for diesel users.

Conversely, for the small minority of teachers using public transport, active transport, or hybrid or electric vehicles, the proportion declines.

Figure 6



	Hugely	Significantly	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all	Total
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lower Quartile	10	9	6	4	3	6
Median	**20**	**15**	**12**	**8**	**5**	**12**
Upper Quartile	35	27	21	15	12	24
Maximum	100	100	100	86	80	100
Mean	**25.8**	**20.2**	**15.8**	**11.7**	**9.6**	**17.4**

There is also a clear relationship between the distance a teacher travels and their feelings of financial pressure. The median travel distance for those 'hugely' affected is 20 km compared with 12 km overall and 5km for those reporting 'not at all' (Figure 6). (Distance and mode used are of course inter-related.)

The influence of school characteristics

Survey respondents identified the school where they taught and these responses have been linked with Ministry of Education about the characteristics of these schools to provide some 'school factor' context for the other responses in the survey.

The following school factors have been identified as influencing teachers' mode of travel, distance travelled and financial pressure:

» Geographic category,
» Level of isolation,
» Level of disadvantage as measured by the Equity Index (EQI), and
» Association with a Kaupapa Māori Education peak entity.

These factors are all inter-linked, although sometimes in nuanced ways. For instance, least disadvantaged schools are clustered in the most metropolitan areas, whereas the most disadvantaged tend to be either metropolitan or rural/small townships; average disadvantaged schools are clustered in the provincial centres.

Geographic category

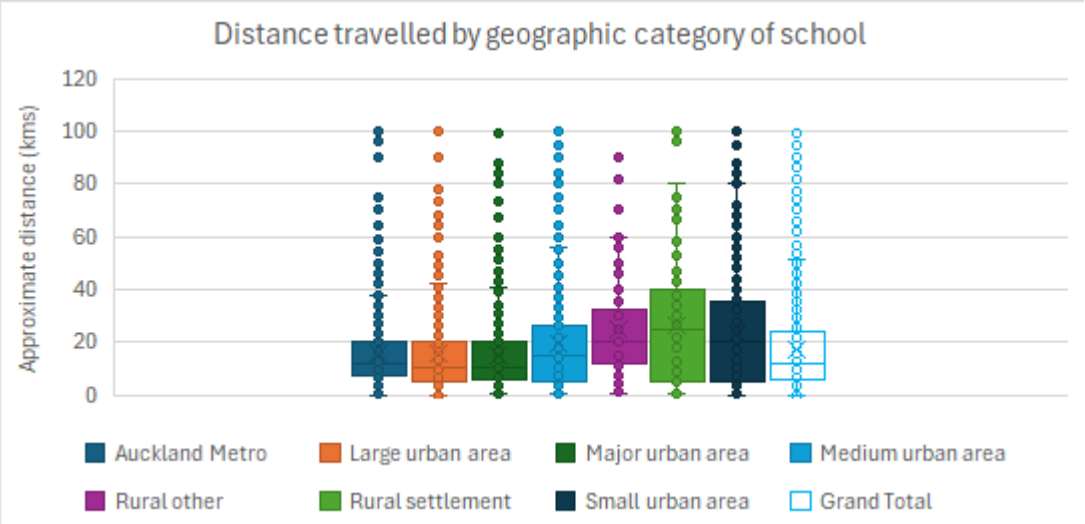
The geographic categories used here are the six 'Urban/Rural' categories designed by Statistics New Zealand. In the Ministry's School Directory each school is assigned to one of these categories, based on its physical location. We have further disaggregated 'Major urban area' by separately identifying schools with this designation located within the Auckland region.

Table 2 Mode of transport by geographic category of school

	# Responses	Private motor vehicle %	Active transport %	Bus/public transport %	Mix/ other %
Auckland Metro	1,461	91%	3%	1%	5%
Major urban area	1,476	85%	4%	1%	10%
Large urban area	1,016	89%	3%	0%	7%
Medium urban area	721	91%	4%	0%	5%
Small urban area	884	90%	4%	0%	5%
Rural settlement	129	88%	8%	0%	5%
Rural other	100	94%	3%	0%	3%
Grand Total	5,787	89%	4%	1%	7%

Because car use is so ubiquitous, geographic category has limited impact on this.

Figure 7



	Auckland Metro	Large urban area	Major urban area	Medium urban area	Rural other	Rural settlement	Small urban area
Minimum	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lower Quartile	7	5	6	5	13	6	5
Median	**12**	**10**	**10**	**15**	**20**	**25**	**20**
Upper Quartile	20	20	20	26	31	40	35
Maximum	100	100	99	100	90	100	100
Mean	**15.4**	**15.6**	**14.9**	**19.3**	**24.4**	**26.3**	**23.2**

However, there is a clear impact of geographic category on distance travelled. The median teacher in a school in a large or major urban area travels 10km to school (with Auckland slightly further at 12km). By contrast the median for small urban areas and 'other rural' is 20km and for rural settlements it is 25km (Figure 7).[1]

Table 3 Financial pressure by geographic category of school

Are fuel costs currently a source of financial pressure for you?	Auckland Metro	Major urban area	Large urban area	Medium urban area	Small urban area	Rural settlement	Rural other
Hugely	14%	10%	13%	15%	19%	26%	27%
Significantly	29%	28%	24%	28%	31%	29%	23%
Somewhat	17%	18%	20%	16%	14%	10%	12%
Slightly	34%	38%	38%	36%	32%	32%	36%
Not at all	6%	6%	4%	5%	4%	2%	2%

This in turn flows through much higher likelihoods of experiencing financial pressure (Table 3).

Level of isolation

Another way of describing the geographic characteristics of a school is by using the Isolation Index calculated by the Ministry of Education for the purposes of allocation Isolation Funding[2] to some schools.

For this analysis we have divided schools into three groups: those with an Isolation Index score of 1.27 or above who qualify for isolation funding ("Receives isolation funding"); the 50% of schools who receive the median Isolation Index score 0.75 or less "Not isolated"); and those in between with an Isolation Index of between 0.75 and 1.27 who we have designated "Moderately isolated".

Table 4 Mode of transport by level of isolation of school

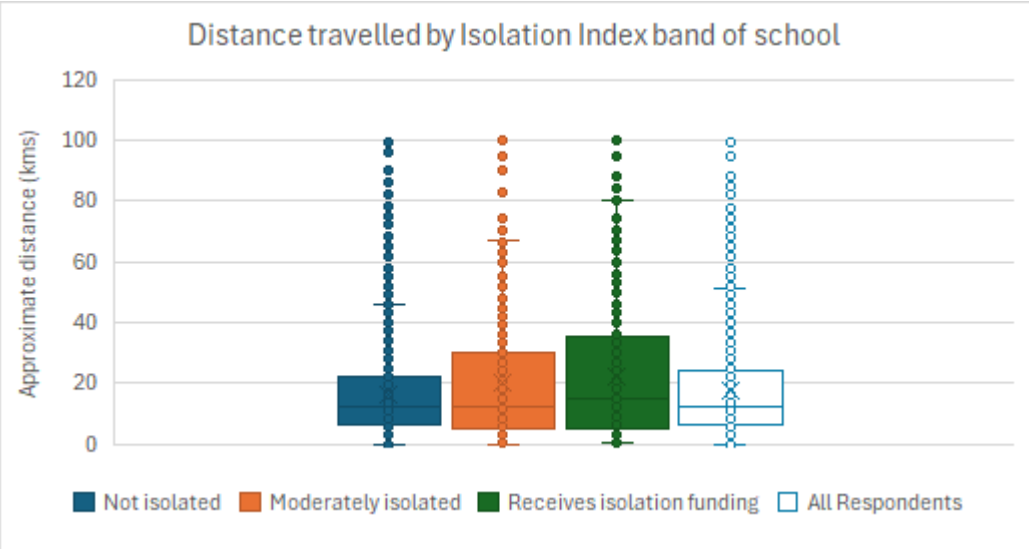
	# Responses	Private motor vehicle %	Active transport %	Bus/public transport %	Mix/ other %
Not isolated	4,558	89%	4%	1%	7%
Moderately isolated	744	92%	3%	0%	4%
Receives isolation funding	485	88%	6%	0%	6%

There is not much variation in the (high) rates of private motor vehicle use based on level of isolation. (Table 4).

[1] Examples of a 'small urban area' include Kerikeri, Coromandel, Ōpōtiki, Ōtaki, Greymouth and Gore. Examples of schools in 'rural settlements' include Taipa Area School, Hurunui College, and TKKM o Te Waiu o Ngāati Porou. Examples of schools in 'other rural' areas include Otamatea High School, Tauraroa Area School, and Hato Paora College.

[2] Isolation Funding is allocated to schools who qualify for it to recognise the higher operating costs these schools require to operate and deliver the curriculum.

Figure 8



	Not isolated	Moderately isolated	Receives isolation funding	All Respondents
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Lower Quartile	6	5	5	6
Median	**12**	**12**	**15**	**12**
Upper Quartile	22	30	35	24
Maximum	100	100	100	100
Mean	**16.5**	**19.8**	**22.3**	**17.4**

However, teachers at more isolated schools travel longer distances. This can be seen at the mean and the median but particularly at the upper end of the distribution. 25% of teachers at schools that are 'Not Isolated' travel 22 km or more, whereas the corresponding figure are 30 km for "Moderately isolated" schools and 35km for schools that "Receive isolation funding" (Figure 8)

Table 5 Financial pressure by level of isolation of school

	Not isolated	Moderately isolated	Receives isolation funding
Hugely	13%	17%	20%
Significantly	28%	28%	31%
Somewhat	36%	34%	33%
Slightly	18%	17%	12%
Not at all	5%	4%	4%

Teachers at schools that are "Moderately isolated" or "'Receive isolation funding' are somewhat more likely to feel that fuel costs are "hugely" contributing to financial pressure (17% and 20% compared with 13%) (Table 5).

Equity Index

Every school has an Equity Index or EQI score that identifies the extent to which its student population faces "barriers to socioeconomic achievement" on the basis of its socioeconomic characteristics. The EQI replaced the 'Decile' system and is used to allocate Equity Funding and other forms of support.

The Ministry of Education has developed an approach for grouping schools' EQI score into bands as set out in Figure 9.

Figure 9 Outline of EQI bands from the Ministry of Education's Education Counts website

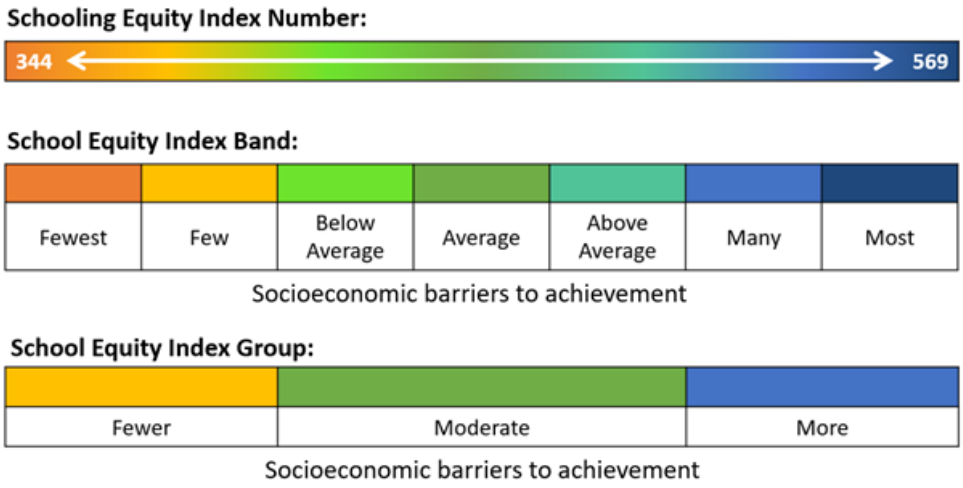
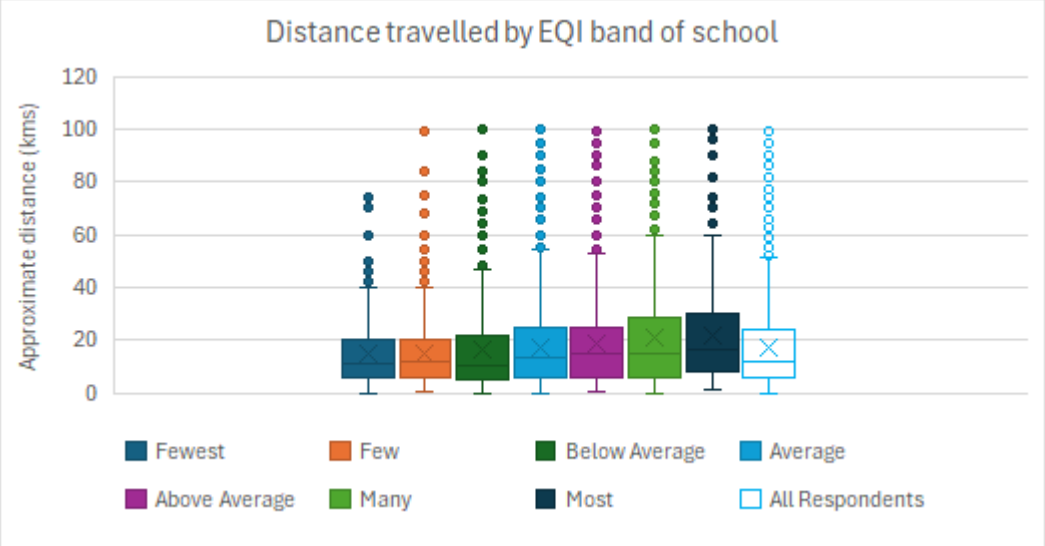


Table 6 Mode of transport by EQI band of school

	# Responses	Private motor vehicle %	Active transport %	Bus/public transport %	Mix/ other %
Fewest	600	88%	3%	1%	9%
Few	942	88%	4%	0%	7%
Below Average	1,039	86%	5%	1%	8%
Average	1,051	88%	5%	0%	7%
Above Average	942	91%	3%	1%	5%
Many	760	92%	2%	1%	6%

While rates of private vehicle use are high across the board, they are highest for teachers at schools with the highest EQI scores, i.e. those categorised as having "above average", "many" or the "most" barriers to socioeconomic achievement (Table 6).

Figure 10



	Fewest	Few	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Many	Most	All Respondents
Minimum	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lower Quartile	6	6	5	6	6	6	8	6
Median	**11**	**12**	**10**	**13**	**15**	**15**	**16**	**12**
Upper Quartile	20	20	22	25	25	28	30	24
Maximum	74	99	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean	**14.6**	**15.0**	**16.1**	**17.4**	**18.6**	**20.7**	**21.5**	**17.4**

No doubt relatedly, there is a clear trend for the distance that teachers travel to rise across the EQI bands. This can be seen across the median, mean and upper quartile (Figure 10).

Table 7 Financial pressure by EQI band of school

Are fuel costs currently a source of financial pressure for you?	Fewest	Few	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Many	Most
Hugely	10%	12%	12%	13%	15%	18%	22%
Significantly	26%	27%	25%	31%	29%	29%	31%
Somewhat	36%	35%	38%	36%	34%	35%	33%
Slightly	22%	19%	19%	16%	17%	14%	12%
Not at all	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%	4%	2%

These differences seem to be reflected in a somewhat greater likelihood for teachers in the higher EQI band schools to see fuel costs as a source of financial pressure. 47% of those in the "many" band and 53% of those in the "most" band feel this was "hugely" or "significantly" the case, compared to 36-39% in the lowest three bands (Table 7).

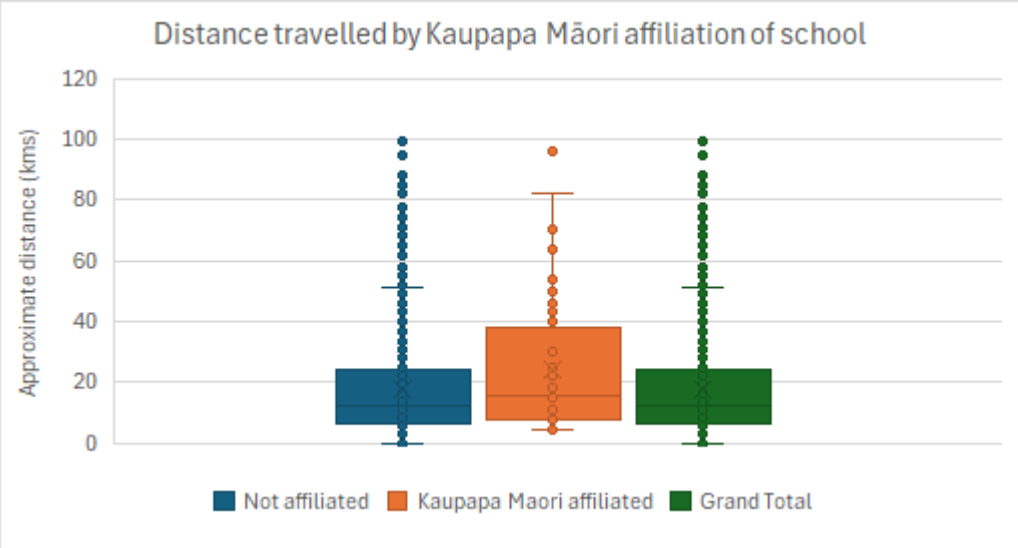
Kaupapa Māori Education

Table 8 Mode of transport by Kaupapa Māori Education affiliation

	# Responses	Private motor vehicle %	Active transport %	Bus/public transport %	Mix/ other %
Not affiliated	6,242	89%	4%	1%	7%
Kaupapa Māori affiliated	56	89%	0%	0%	11%

Only a modest number of respondents taught at schools affiliated with Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa or Te Rūnanga nui o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa. There was no difference in their likelihood to use private motor vehicles (Table 8).

Figure 11



	Not affiliated	Kaupapa Māori affiliated	All Respondents
Minimum	0	4	0
Lower Quartile	6	8	6
Median	**12**	**16**	**12**
Upper Quartile	24	34	24
Maximum	100	96	100
Mean	**17.3**	**23.9**	**17.4**

There does however seem to be a much greater likelihood that a teacher at Kaupapa Māori affiliated schools will travel a long distance. The median, mean and upper quartile are higher than for high EQI bands and comparable with isolated schools or those in small urban areas or rural settlements (Figure 11).

Table 9 Financial pressure by Kaupapa Māori Education affiliation

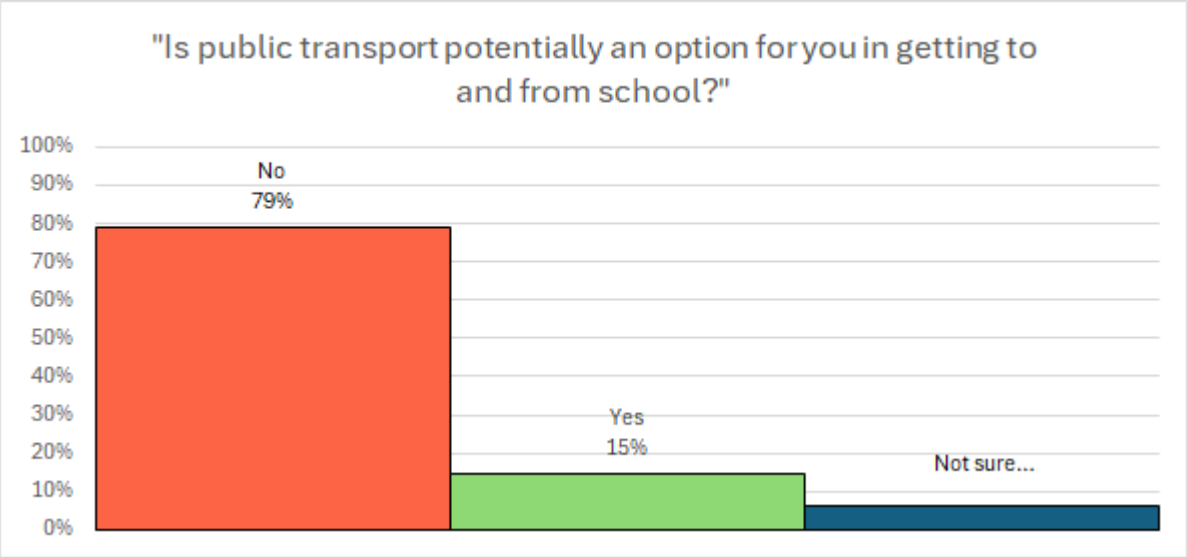
Are fuel costs currently a source of financial pressure for you?	Not affiliated	Kaupapa Māori affiliated
Hugely	14%	38%
Significantly	27%	39%
Somewhat	35%	18%
Slightly	16%	4%
Not at all	5%	2%

The differences in financial pressure from fuel costs are even more stark. 77% of teachers at Kaupapa Māori affiliated schools feel this pressure "hugely" or "significantly", compared to 41% for non-affiliated schools (Table 9).

Public transport as a potential option

The travel patterns identified in our survey are not necessarily set in stone. One hope might be that rising fuel prices might persuade teachers to shift their mode of travel.

Figure 12

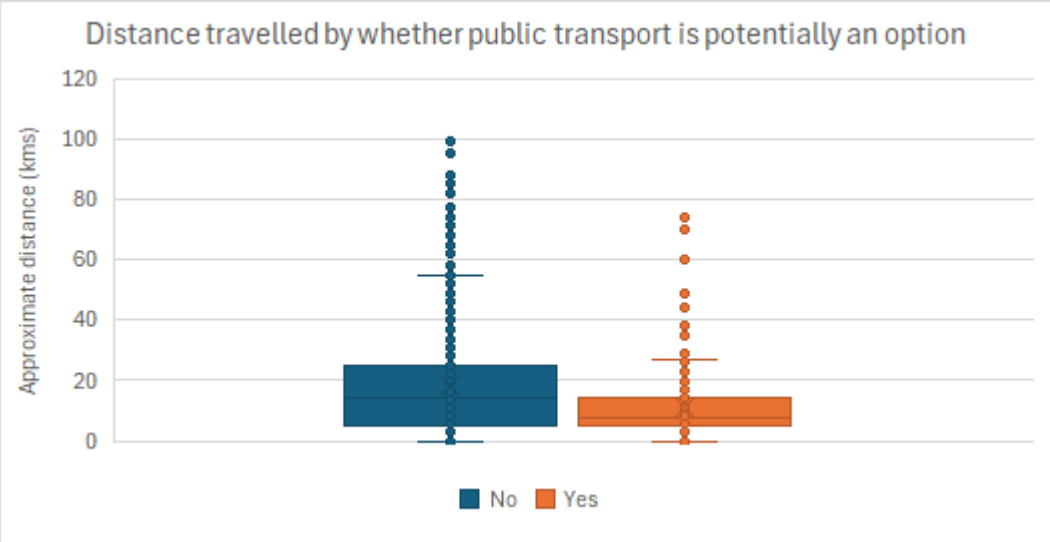


However, we tested for this by asking, "Is public transport potentially an option for you in getting to and from school?" This question was put to teachers who were either exclusively using private vehicles or else a mix of modes but not including public transport.

Only 15% said that public transport was potentially an option, while 79% said it was not (Figure 12).

In the interest of producing a short, accessible quick-turnaround survey, we did not ask respondents to supply reasons. However, one can speculate that they may include: a lack of suitable public transport routes, a need to bring work-related items to and from school, a need to transport partners or children, the need to be on-site relatively early in the mornings, and unpredictability about leaving times after school.

Figure 13



	No - public transport not an option	Yes - public transport a potential option
Minimum	0	0
Lower Quartile	5	5
Median	**15**	**8**
Upper Quartile	25	14
Maximum	100	74
Mean	**18.3**	**10.7**

There is a strikingly different profile to the distances travelled of teachers who would consider public transport compared to those who would not. The median teacher in the 'yes' group travels just over half the distance of their counterpart in the 'no' group (8 km vs 15km) (Figure 13).

Table 10 Financial pressure by whether public transport is an option

Are fuel costs currently a source of financial pressure for you?	Hugely	Significantly	Somewhat	Slightly	Not at all
No - public transport not an option	17%	31%	34%	14%	3%
Yes - public transport a potential option	6%	18%	37%	26%	10%
Not sure	9%	24%	42%	19%	3%

As a result, those teachers most likely to mode shift are actually the ones under the least financial pressure. Only 25% of teachers for whom public transport is an option feel this pressure "hugely" or "significantly", compared to 47% of teachers for whom public transport is not an option. Conversely, 36% of teachers for whom public transport is an option feel this pressure only "slightly" or "not at all", compared to only 16% of teachers for whom public transport is not an option (Table 10).

So, not only is public transport a solution for only a small proportion of teachers, it is also not well-aligned with those teachers who are most vulnerable to the fuel crisis (see also the other factors referenced in Table 11) .

Table 11 Relationship between selected school factors and whether teachers see public transport is an option

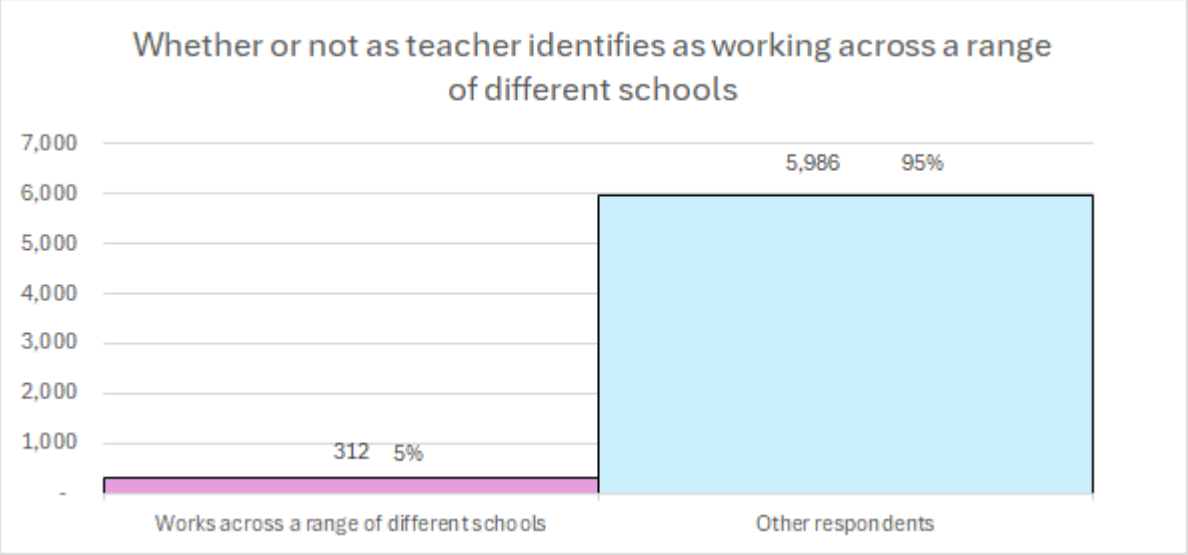
School characteristics associated with more likelihood of public transport being an option	School characteristics associated with less likelihood of public transport being an option
'Fewest' barriers EQI band (29%) Auckland metro (21%)	Receives isolation funding (2%) Small urban area or Rural other (2%) Rural settlement (1%)

Teachers with multiple schools

This section has focussed, up until this point, on teachers who work at one single school, but it may be that the teachers most seriously affected by the fuel crisis are teachers who work across a range of different schools, such as relief teachers and those in specialist roles (including learning support coordinators, resource teachers for learning and behaviour and itinerant teachers).

These teachers hold important responsibilities for ensuring schools can remain open and learners with diverse needs are supported.

Figure 14



5% of survey respondents identified themselves as being in this situation (Figure 14).

Our simple survey format was not able to capture as much information about these teachers -- the school characteristics linkages weren't available and the complexity of their travel distances meant that question wasn't posed to them. But the information that was available is presented below.

Table 12 Mode of transport by whether or not a teacher works across a range of schools

	Private motor vehicle %	Active transport %	Bus/public transport %	Mix/ other %
Works across a range of different schools	89%	1%	0%	10%
Other respondents	89%	4%	1%	7%

Table 13 Kind of fuel used by whether or not a teacher works across a range of schools

	Petrol	Diesel	Petrol hybrid	Electric	Other
Works across a range of different schools	64%	10%	17%	1%	2%
Other respondents	68%	10%	13%	4%	1%

Teachers who work across a range of different schools have the same level of private motor vehicle use as other teachers, but the car they use is slightly less likely to run on petrol and more likely to be a hybrid.

Table 14 Financial pressure by whether or not a teacher works across a range of schools

Are fuel costs currently a source of financial pressure for you?	Works across a range of different schools	Other respondents
Hugely	24%	14%
Significantly	30%	28%
Somewhat	33%	35%
Slightly	10%	17%
Not at all	3%	5%

As expected, teachers who work across a range of different schools were more likely to feel the financial pressure from fuel costs "hugely" or "significantly" (54% compared to 41% for other respondents) (Table 14).

The 'outlier' teachers

To finish this section, it is worth returning to the 4% of teachers who can be classified as outliers in terms of the distances they travel between home and school. Based on the pattern of distances in this survey we have identified 51 km as the threshold at which a teacher joins this outlier group.

But are these outliers clustered together in relatively remote schools where many if not most teachers travel long distances? Or are they scattered across a broad mix of schools, working alongside other teachers, many of whom may travel relatively short distances? In short, do these long distances reflect a 'remote school' phenomenon or a 'remote teacher' phenomenon?

Table 15 Key statistics relating to outlier teachers (i.e. those who travel 51km or more between home and school) by grouping of geographic categories

	Major/large/ medium urban	Small urban and rural	Across all geographic categories
The proportion of outlier teachers who are at schools in this category	56%	44%	100%
The proportion of teachers in this category teaching at a school with at least one outlier teacher	41%	54%	43%
For schools with outlier teachers, the proportion of teachers who are outliers	7%	17%	9%
For schools without outlier teachers, the average distance travelled by non-outlier teachers (km)	14	19	15
For schools with outlier teachers, the average distance travelled by non-outlier teachers (km)	18	28	16

The table above presents a set of statistics about outlier teachers, which build up a picture in response to those questions (Table 15).

More than half of the outlier teachers work in major/large/medium urban areas. Particularly in urban areas, but even in more rural ones, outlier teachers tend to make up only a small proportion of the teaching staff at a school. But the corollary of this is that nearly half (slightly more than half in more rural areas) of schools have at least one outlier teacher teaching there.

Overall, other teachers in schools that have outlier teachers don't tend to travel longer distances than teachers in schools that have no non-outlier teachers. However, this is not true in small urban areas where a non-outlier teacher at a school that does have outlier teachers on staff travels 28km on average compared to only 19km on average if there were no outlier teachers at the school. This suggests the 'remote school' explanation at least in less urban areas. Nevertheless, the 'remote teacher' dynamic seems to prevail more overall, and especially in more urban areas.

From a public policy perspective, this means that neither targeting assistance exclusively to the school or exclusively to the teacher is likely to capture everyone who needs support.

Section 3: Students' travel

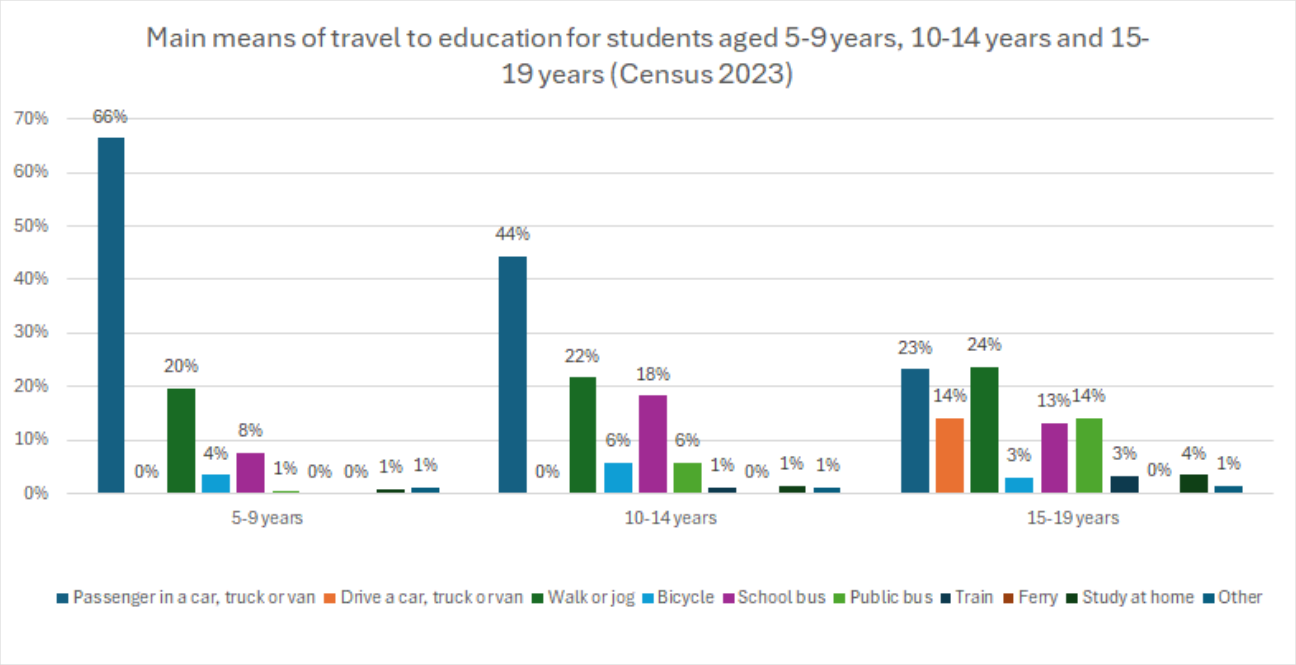
Even if it were feasible to meet all of the challenges involved in ensuring that teachers' travel to and from school can be maintained if the crisis worsens, this would not be enough on its own for face-to-face learning to be viable. Students would also need to be continuing to manage to make it to school and back each day.

The key message of this section is that, here again, the use of private motor vehicles is also key. It might be assumed that most students walk, cycle or travel by bus. This is not the case; it is consistently the case that private motor vehicles are the most common mode of transport for students.

The data analysed for this section comes from the 2023 Census, which asked about the mains means of travel to work and education for members of each household.

Headline results

Figure 15



The Census results are available in five-year age bands and the findings for travel to education are presented for 5-9 year olds, 10-14 year olds, and 15-19 year olds in Figure 15.

None of these bands is perfect for representing secondary school students – the 10-14 band will capture many Year 7 and 8 Students, whereas the 15-19 band will be skewed by tertiary students. On balance, the 10-14 year band has been considered the best proxy and will be used throughout the remainder of this section.

This limitation is mitigated however by the fact that key patterns are consistent across all three bands.

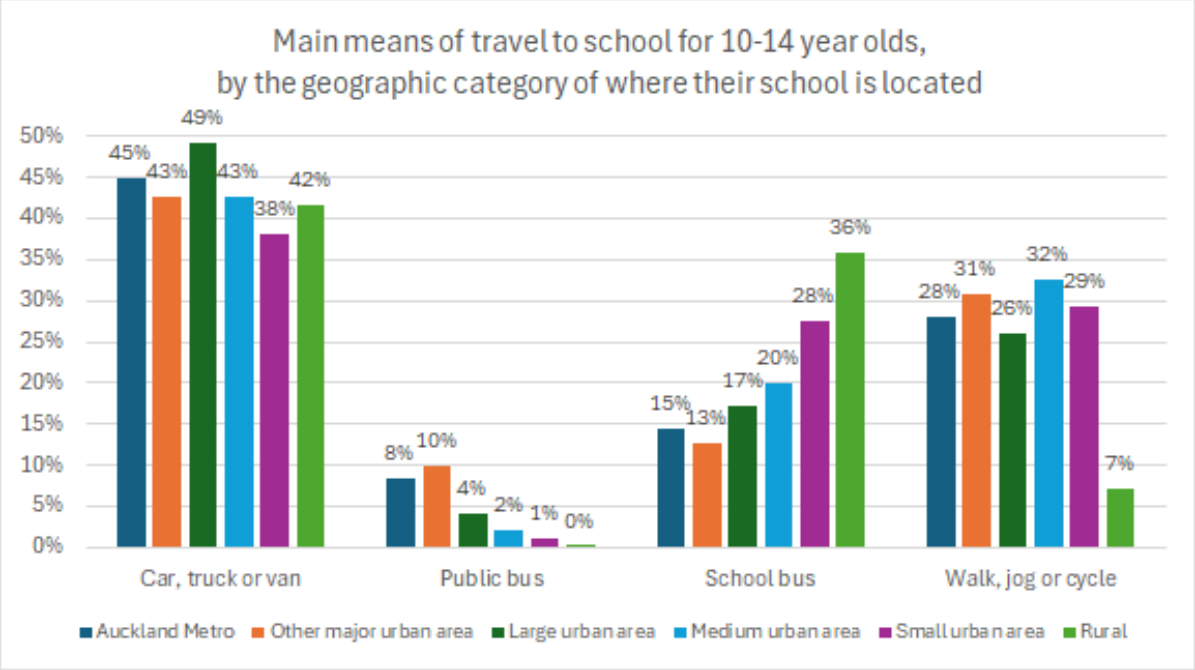
In particular, being a passenger in (or for 15-19 year olds, driving) a car, truck or van is by far the most prevalent means of travel to school for all three bands. Nearly half (44%) of 10-14 year olds and nearly as a high a proportion (37%) of 15-19 year olds use this mode. The figure is significantly higher again (66%) for 5-9 year olds, who are no more likely to walk to school and much less likely to bus.

Bus use is far less prevalent than travel by motor vehicle, accounting for only 24% of 10-14 year olds. Across the country, they were three times as likely to travel by school bus (18%) as by public bus (6%), although this pattern varies across different geographical categories.

Slightly more 10-14 year olds use active modes of transport. Walking or jogging accounts for 22% of 10-14 year olds and cycling accounts for 6% of 10-14 year olds. Again, there is considerable geographic variation in this pattern.

Geographic category

Figure 16



When the national totals are disaggregated into geographic categories (Figure 16),[3] the fundamental fact is that the headline findings remain: private vehicle use is the dominant mode of transport for every geographic category.

The second point is that there is, however, some variation, with small urban areas and rural areas standing out from the others, in particular:

» At 38%, small urban areas have a notably lower rate of private vehicle use (though still higher than any other mode)
» Small urban areas and especially rural areas have higher rates of school bus use, and rural areas have much lower ability to use active modes.

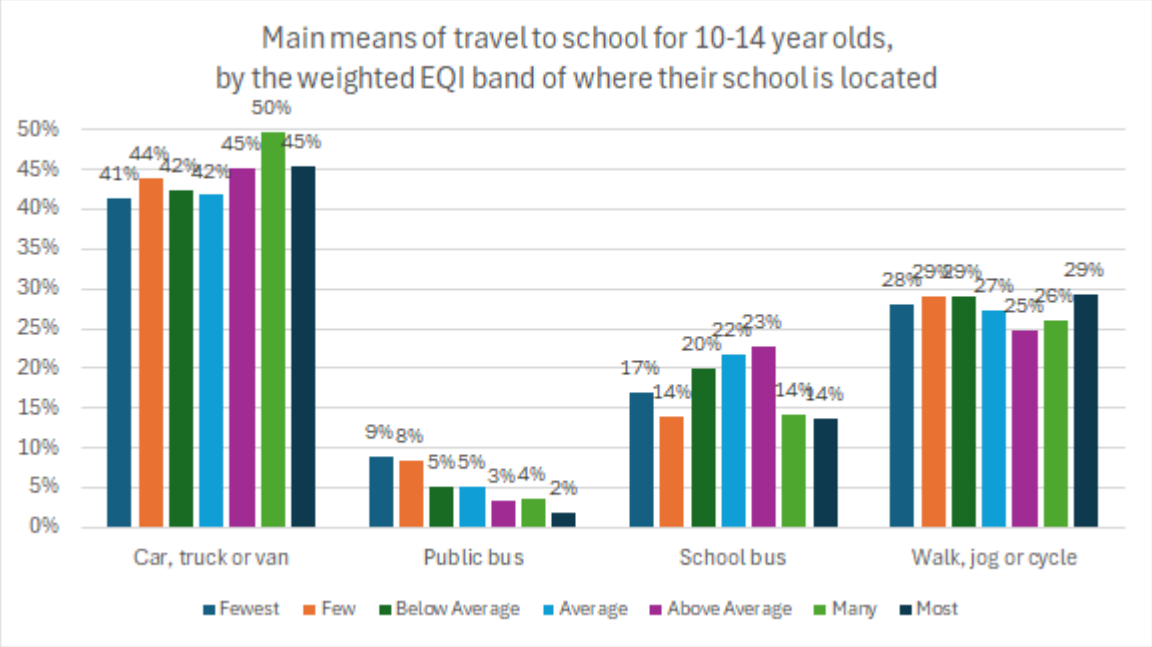
The third point, though, is that this variance needs to be placed in perspective: these are the smallest two geographic categories in terms of population. Only 9% of 10-14 year olds were living in small urban areas and only 6% in rural areas.

EQI

Turning to relative disadvantage or disadvantages, the SA2 geographic units can be assigned to the EQI bands discussed in Section 1, based on the weighted average of the schools that are located there.

[3] The approach for doing this is a bit more complicated than for teachers. Statistics New Zealand's urban/rural categories do not have identical boundaries to its smaller territorial groupings (called SA2) but in practice cross-reference with the Ministry directory shows that all of the schools in a SA2 unit have the same urban/rural category designation except in rural areas where a single unit may often have a mix of school in 'rural settlement' and 'other rural' locations. Therefore, we have merged these two categories into 'rural' for the purposes of this section.

Figure 17

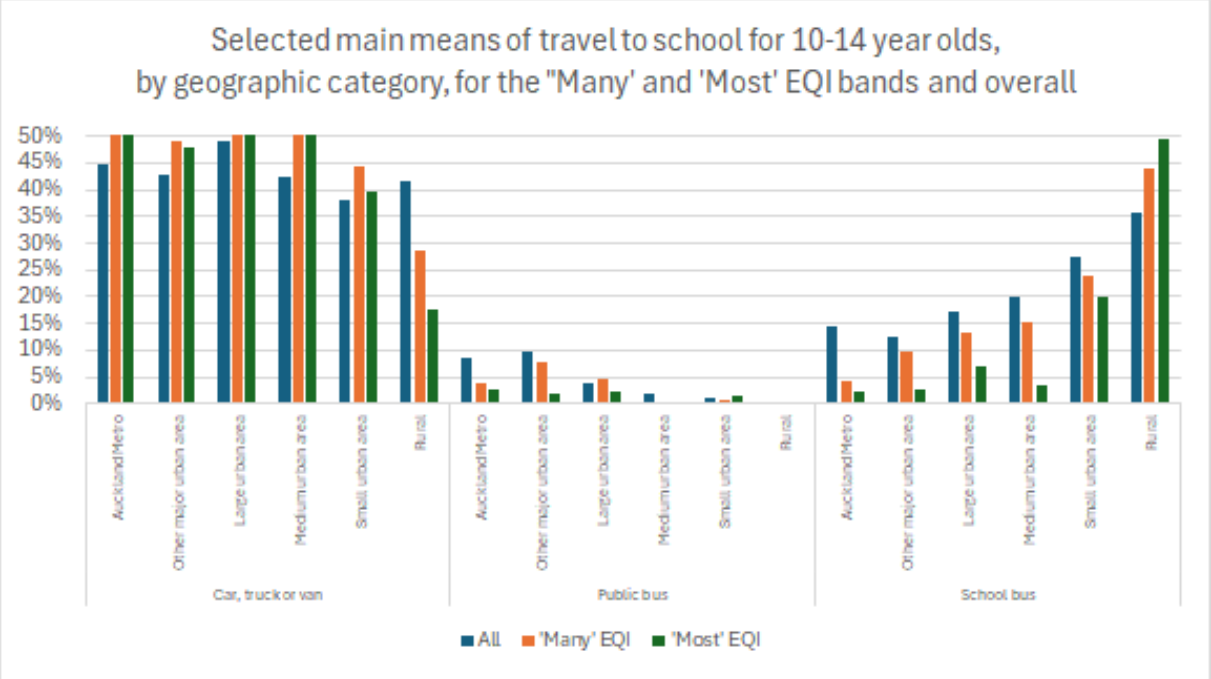


As with geographic categories, the main picture shown is one of consistency. One the whole, the seven EQI bands have similar levels of usage of each of the modes of transport (Figure 17).

However, there is some variation. In particular those localities with "many" or the "most" barriers to socioeconomic achievement are less likely to travel by school bus, and those in the "many" bands are more likely to travel by car.

These findings may seem counter-intuitive and it might be assumed that they reflect the differing urban/rural compositions of the different EQI bands. However, this is not entirely the case.

Figure 18



As shown in Figure 18, (apart from the small 'Rural' category) both the 'Many' and 'Most' bands are more likely to travel by car and less likely to travel by school bus across the range of geographic categories. (The differences between 'Many'

and 'Most' at the national level, on the other hand, do seem to be compositional, with the 'Most' band less likely than the 'Many' categories to be concentrated in major urban areas.)

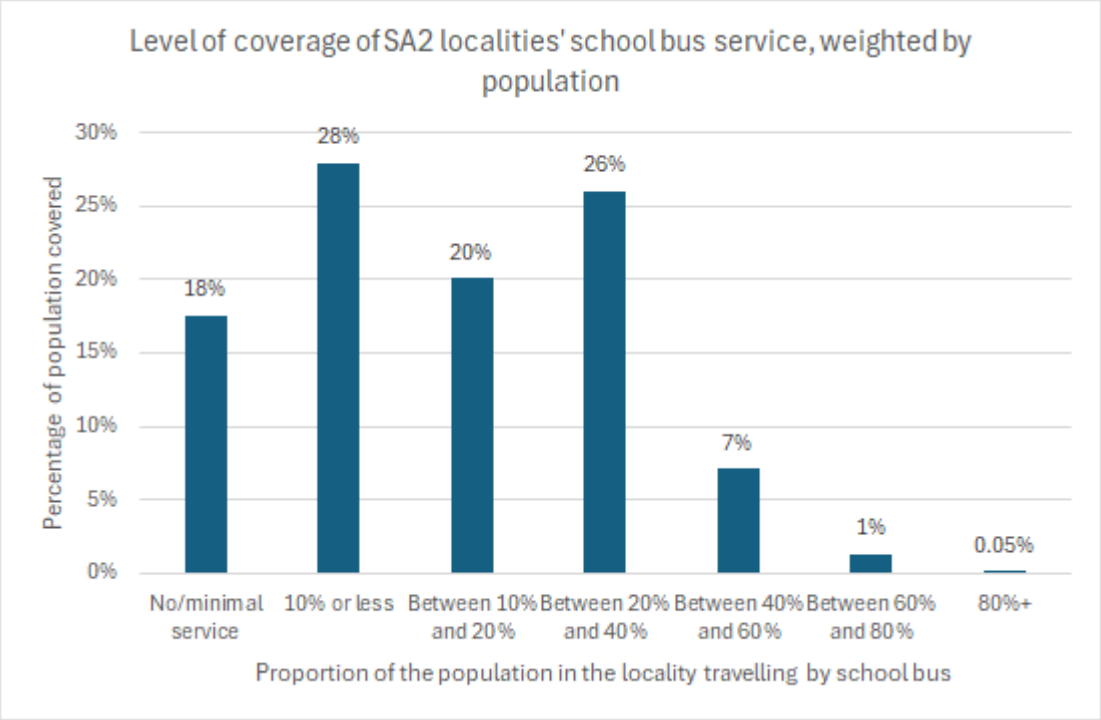
The potential for scaling-up school bus use

As with teachers, one hope that might be underpinning ideas about maintaining face-to-face learning is that, in the fuel crisis content, students may 'mode shift' from private vehicles to buses.

While there are likely to be various practical obstacles to such a 'mode shift', the fact that there are already a significant minority of students (moreso than teachers) using school buses might be a source of encouragement.

With school buses in particular, though, capacity constraints are likely to be the most significant problem with a 'mode shift' strategy, especially when one recognises how modest the proportion of students travelling by school bus is in many localities, and how that compares to private vehicle use.

Figure 19

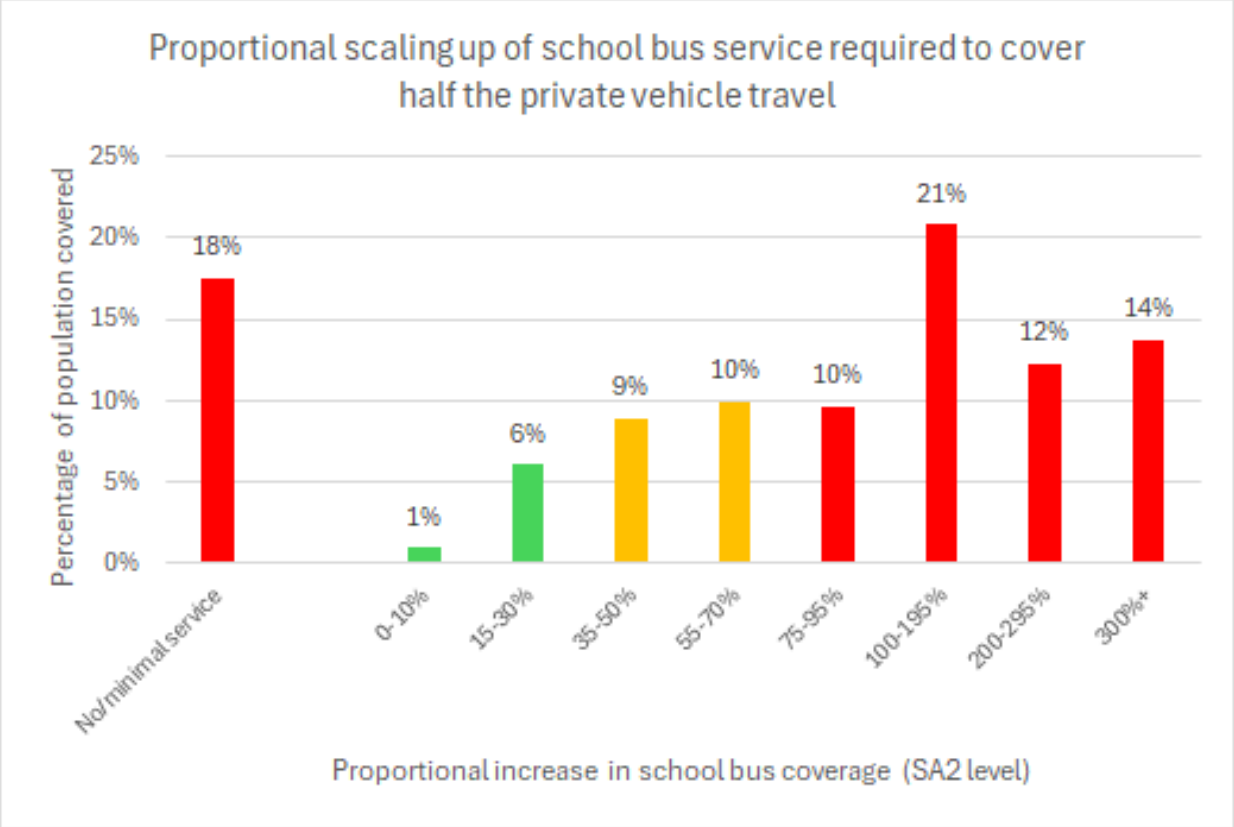


Nearly half (45%) of 10-14 year olds live in localities (i.e. SA2 units) where 10% or fewer of the population travel by school bus. Only 8% live in localities where the proportion exceeds 40% (Figure 19).

This has consequences for the scale of increase in school bus use that would make a material difference to private vehicle use.

As an indicative illustration of this, we have calculated for each locality the percentage increase in bus use that would be required to reduce private vehicle use by 50%.

Figure 20



Only 7% of 10-14 year were living in localities where an at least potentially achievable scaling-up of 30% or less would meet this target. By contrast, 47% of them lived in localities where the scale-up would 100% or (in many cases significantly) more (Figure 20).

Section 4: Complexities and solutions raised by teachers

This report has aimed to give some insights into one particular challenge that teachers and students are facing as a result of the fuel crisis, namely travel between home and school. It was outside the scope of short, accessible, quick-turnaround survey to try to grapple with the full range of complexities that teachers, students, principals and schools are facing or are likely to face.

However, some of our members have proactively contacted us, sometimes in response to the survey we circulated, to offer valuable insights into some of these other challenges.

The following list is (with gratitude) informed by these teachers:

- Teachers live in households which have their own complexities and constraints on commuting arrangements. In some cases, their mornings are timed to the minute, to accommodate other household members also traveling in the same car or meeting their public transport schedule. For these teachers, carpooling with other staff simply isn't a realistic option.
- There are number of disabled teachers who face limited mobility and are therefore constrained in the transport options available to them.
- Teachers' hours are also a factor, as transport options can be different depending upon whether you're full time or part time.
- There will be a need to maintain access to on-site services, such as counselling, for students whose families are severely challenged by the crisis.

Particular subject areas will have their own dynamics. For instance, Food Technology teachers need to collect groceries from local supermarkets, almost daily, especially given the new curriculum where students are testing individual components -- this entails additional travel, plus rising delivery costs are likely to increase the cost of these ingredients.

Members also had ideas about dealing with the current and impending pressures in a proactive way. For instance:

> *I would like to request that teachers be allowed to use Rural School buses if they live on the bus route, to reduce teacher petrol costs*

And:

> *I'd like to suggest a "4+1" model (four days on-site, one day remote) as a precautionary measure the PPTA could raise with the government. I believe this would offer several critical benefits:*
>
> *Immediate Relief: It would cut fuel consumption by 20% for staff and families overnight, helping existing supplies last longer and providing immediate financial breathing room.*
>
> *Proactive Planning: We've already proven we can deliver online learning effectively. Transitioning now, on our own terms, is far less disruptive than waiting for a total supply collapse or forced rationing.*
>
> *Collective Benefit: Even if some students or roles need to remain on-site, reducing the total volume of commuters eases the burden on the entire system and helps maintain operations for everyone.*
>
> *I truly believe taking a modest, planned step now is the most equitable way to support staff while keeping our schools functioning.*

And:

> *Now is the perfect time [for the Ministry of Education] to reconsider making the WorkRide programme available to Teachers and School Staff. It is a cost neutral scheme to the employer, providing the option for the employee to buy a heavily discounted bike and pay it off over 12months, making buying a bike more accessible.*
>
> *E-bike commuter style bikes make riding a bike to work much more accessible to a wider range of people. It's not a solution for everyone, but I see many people that don't think they have the fitness and mobility to ride to work, and they don't realise how easy a good commuter e-bike can make it.*

There will be a range of other ideas out 'at the chalk-face'. But it will be important to get ahead of the potential worsening of the situation.

And to recognise the level of reliance on private motor vehicles and the constraints on public transport as an alternative, which have been highlighted in this report.