**Taking people on the journey through storytelling**

They say a picture can paint a thousand words, but sometimes the picture by itself isn’t enough.

Being a transport planner working on public transport services entails making changes. People’s reactions can vary from embracing change, to wondering what it will mean for them, through to fear of change. Sometimes because they see it will disadvantage them, sometimes it is just a fear of the unknown.

This is where we need the words to go with the pictures, the map may show exactly what a bus will do, the story is to tell people how they will make their journeys. It’s about explaining that things are changing, sometimes meaning people have to rethink the way they travel. The storytelling exercise can take the form of virtual handholding, from journey start to finish, using words to paint the picture. Some people still won’t like the change, however if the best we can do is making them understand why we have made the changes which can be a success in itself.

We use storytelling in a more general way to explain some of why things are the way they are. This includes answering commonly asked questions, turning “why would Auckland Transport do that?” into “that makes perfect sense”.

We use storytelling to share our successes, within the organisation and publicly. In local government it seems the public are quick to pick up on what they perceive are our failures and failure to deliver. It’s always worthwhile talking about what we have done (and done well), demonstrating success publicly, also a reminder to sometimes beleaguered staff that we are making a positive difference.

Storytelling may not be listed as a key attribute on a planner’s job description but telling the story of what we do, and why, can be crucial to our success.