



New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Petitions Committee

Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Petihana

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Petition of Carjam Online Ltd: Reverse plans for the NZTA to charge for free stolen status data in October

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Greg O'Connor, Chairperson

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Petition of Carjam Online Ltd

Recommendation

The Petitions Committee has considered the petition of Carjam Online Ltd—Reverse plans for the NZTA to charge for free stolen status data—and recommends to the Government that it investigate whether there are discrepancies between the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register and the Police website and, if so, that steps be taken to ensure that both sources of official information are accurate and up-to-date.

Request to remove charges for stolen car data

The petition received 44,714 signatures on the Parliament website and was presented to the House by Cameron Luxton on 10 April 2024. It requests:

That the House of Representatives urge the Government to reverse the decision to begin charging for free data including accurate stolen status in October as part of the planned “Fees review”.

Background

This petition concerns user charges that were introduced by the New Zealand Transport Agency | Waka Kotahi (NZTA) in October 2023.¹ NZTA reviewed all fees, charges, and funding, including a period of public consultation in 2022. Following the review, charges were introduced for use of data on the Motor Vehicle Register by commercial users and councils.

Comments from the petitioner

CarJam is a company that provides information to the public about vehicles, including car ownership details and whether a vehicle is recorded as stolen.² Its information is gathered from government and private sources, including NZTA and the New Zealand Police. It told us there is a widespread public perception that it is the main source of information about New Zealand vehicles. CarJam said the public expects “absolute accuracy” from the free and paid reports it provides. It does not charge for reports on a vehicle’s stolen status.

CarJam said that, until the new charges were introduced on 1 October 2023, it had gathered its information from a combination of both Police and NZTA data. It now relies on just the Police data, because that data is still free. The problem is that there are significant differences between the information available from the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register and that available on the Police website.

The petitioner’s experience of differences between Police and NZTA data

The petitioner told us that the information available from the Police website and NZTA’s Motor Vehicle Register is not synchronised. Although all information on stolen vehicles is

¹ Further information about the NZTA review of regulatory funding and fees is [available on the NZTA website](#).

² Further information about CarJam is [available on its website](#).

initially provided by the Police, the information is updated immediately on the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register, whereas there is a delay before the Police's public data is updated. The petitioner said it was "non-intuitive" that the NZTA data is more accurate than the Police data, but that was its experience.

We were told that at the time the NZTA charges were introduced a vehicle's stolen status was available in real time from the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register, but the Police website was 10 hours behind. CarJam told us the delay has since reduced to one hour. However, at the time of our hearing, it said there was still a time discrepancy between the Motor Vehicle Register and the Police website.

The petitioner told us that this is not the only difference between the two sites. It said that, in its experience, the Police website does not include a substantial number of vehicles, including vehicles that may have been deregistered but can still be legally sold. CarJam said it has provided NZTA and the Police with examples of discrepancies between the two sites for specific car licence plates. It said it also regularly receives emails from members of the public asking about discrepancies between the two sites.

CarJam told us it has had many conversations with NZTA and the Police about why the NZTA data is more extensive and accurate than the information available from the Police, but it has not received an explanation.

CarJam said any delay in informing the public about a vehicle's stolen status gives additional time to criminals. It said, "It is a simple matter for criminals to transfer stolen, cancelled, deregistered plates to any vehicle in the full knowledge that no one can accurately and freely identify the status of such plates". It told us it can no longer guarantee the accuracy of the stolen vehicle status information it provides to the public in its free reports.

The petitioner believes NZTA's decision to introduce charges was not balanced against increased risks to safety. It said the intention of its petition was to increase security and reduce crime. CarJam told us it would not have needed to petition Parliament on this issue if the Police website was updated in real time and included all vehicles on the NZTA Motor Vehicle Registry.

Charges for NZTA data

CarJam told us that assumptions were made about its willingness and ability to pay for information when the decision was made to introduce charges for NZTA Motor Vehicle Registry data. It told us that, during the consultation period, budget planning documents showed that NZTA expected to recover approximately \$1 million per month, based on CarJam's previous use of data.

The petitioner told us it had given feedback during the consultation that it would not be able to absorb the proposed charges, and that the budgeted cost recovery from use of the NZTA data would not happen. It said the NZTA review team had responded that it was confident with its cost recovery estimates.

CarJam explained that the stolen status of vehicles is information it had previously been able to access without charge, and it had also passed that on without charge in its free reports.

CarJam said it continues to access and provide information from the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register for its paid reports. However, it makes substantially fewer inquiries to the register.

The petitioner said that NZTA has now twice introduced changes in the availability and use of data, in 2011 and again in October 2023. It said this does not affect CarJam's financial bottom line. It continues to provide reports for customers who pay for them. Those reports provide information from a wider range of sources than NZTA and the Police website. For example, they may include information about whether there is money owing on a car, and about a vehicle's history, such as odometer readings. What has changed is that it can no longer provide what it believes to be accurate information about a car's stolen status for free to the public.

Comments from NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi

NZTA told us that it reviewed its fees and charges following an independent report from MartinJenkins in 2019. It said this was the first comprehensive review of its fees and charges since the agency was established in 2008. The review concluded that some people and companies were paying more than they should for services, others were paying less, and some were not paying at all.

Public consultation on proposed changes was held in 2022. Following this, changes to regulatory funding, fees, and charges were approved by Cabinet in August 2023, and came into effect on 1 October 2023. This included changes to fees for:

- driver licensing and driver testing
- vehicle certification services
- motor vehicle licences and registration
- charges for commercial users and councils that access NZTA data through the Motor Vehicle Register.

NZTA data

NZTA collects and stores vehicle information on the Motor Vehicle Register and driver data on the Driver Licence Register. It said access to the Motor Vehicle Register is limited to:

- approved commercial users
- councils and council-controlled organisations
- central government agencies, the wider state sector, and agencies acting on their behalf to use the information for law enforcement.

Individuals and businesses can also make one-off requests for data.

Authorised users make inquiries by using an online portal service called Motochek, which is a user-pays service. The agency said that CarJam is an authorised user of Motochek.

NZTA said it relies on stolen vehicle information and data collected by the Police. It said that when a vehicle is recorded as stolen in the Police system, the record in the Motor Vehicle Register is automatically updated to show the vehicle as stolen.

The agency noted that the public can find out free of charge through the Police website whether a vehicle is stolen. It acknowledged that the Police website is not updated in real

time, as is the Motor Vehicle Register. However, it said that while the Police website was previously updated only three times a day, that has now improved, and the website is now updated hourly.

We asked whether NZTA was aware that CarJam finds the NZTA data more accurate than the Police data. It told us it does not know how that could be the case, since the NZTA data comes from the Police. It told us, “People don’t report stolen vehicles to NZTA, they report stolen vehicles to the Police... We don’t know how our data can be more accurate when we are not the source of the data”.

Charges for NZTA data

NZTA told us that its information-provision service, and other regulatory activities, are intended to be cost-recovered. It collects fees and levies from users to pay for the services provided. The agency said that guidance from the Treasury and the Auditor-General requires that services are not cross-subsidised from other parts of the system.

We were told that policy work on the proposed charges considered whether NZTA should continue providing this information as a public good. However, in August 2023 Cabinet decided that the services should be user-pays. Changes were then made to regulations to introduce a fee for access to NZTA data to recover the cost of providing the service.

We asked how the fees were calculated. NZTA said the total cost of the Motor Vehicle Register is approximately \$11.4 million per year. It was estimated that there were 69 million transactions per year. The charge of 18.4 cents (including GST) per transaction was calculated by dividing \$11.4 million by 69 million. The agency said that introducing a charge per request was a simple way of ensuring that costs were recovered from the parties who use the system.

NZTA said that, before the new charge was introduced, CarJam was responsible for approximately 56 percent of all Motochek inquiries, but was only paying 16 percent of the total cost of maintaining the infrastructure for the service. The agency said that, since the introduction of the charges, “CarJam’s volumes have gone way down, so the number of transactions over Motochek have significantly dropped”. It told us that while it had hoped to recover the \$11.4 million cost of the service, it was not currently recouping that amount.

Other uses of NZTA data

We asked why NZTA maintains a separate register of vehicles if the information simply duplicates Police data. We heard that there are other uses for the stolen vehicle status information on the Motor Vehicle Register. For example, this is checked when a person registers a vehicle or pays a motor vehicle registration fee. We also heard that NZTA now has responsibility for sending safety camera infringement notices. Information about stolen vehicle status is used in determining whether a car owner is responsible for an infringement by their vehicle.

The agency told us that the registers cost more to maintain and operate than the \$11.4 million per year that was expected to be collected from commercial users of the Motor Vehicle Register. A portion of the revenue from other transactions, such as vehicle licensing and driver licence applications, also goes towards maintenance of the registers.

Our response to the petition

We thank the petitioner for bringing this issue to our attention.

We note that the petitioner is a commercial user of data from the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register. That means that CarJam uses data from the register in reports for which it charges its customers. We have no specific comments to make about charges for that commercial use. It is also not the main focus of the petition.

We understand that the petitioner is primarily concerned about public access to information about vehicles' stolen status. This is information that was previously available for free from the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register and is still available without charge on the website of the New Zealand Police. This information was previously provided by the petitioner in its free reports.

The petitioner has told us that its concern is about the effect of changes to the availability of information on public safety. We accept that the petitioner's motivation in raising this concern is not for its own profitability, but for public safety and the prevention of crime.

Discrepancies between information available from NZTA and the Police

CarJam told us that there are discrepancies between the information about stolen vehicle status that is available on the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register and that available on the Police website. It told us it regards the information on the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register as more accurate than the information on the Police website. It said it can no longer depend on the accuracy of information about stolen vehicle status because of these discrepancies.

We think that if information about a vehicle's stolen status is available from two different official sources of information, they should both be accurate. We do not think this is primarily a question of whether that information is free or only available if it is paid for. However, since access to that information is available to all New Zealanders without charge from the website of the New Zealand Police, we think it is especially important that the Police website is as up-to-date and accurate as possible.

Recommendation

We recommend to the Government that it investigate whether there are discrepancies between the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register and the Police website and, if so, that steps be taken to ensure that both sources of official information are accurate and up-to-date.

Assumptions in the NZTA business model

It appears to us that the decision about charges for commercial use of the NZTA Motor Vehicle Register may have been based on an incorrect assumption that numbers of inquiries would remain the same when charges were introduced. However, we heard from both NZTA and CarJam that the volume of inquiries has substantially reduced.

We think it was unlikely that users of the Motor Vehicle Register would have been able and willing to pay for information that they had previously received and passed on for free. In addition, we heard that NZTA needs to maintain the Motor Vehicle Register for its own

business purposes. We question whether the internal and external costs for maintaining the register were apportioned appropriately.

We encourage NZTA to revisit the assumptions made in its business model regarding calculations for charges for commercial use of data in the Motor Vehicle Register.

Appendix

Committee procedure

The petition received 44,714 signatures on the Parliament website. It was presented to the House by Cameron Luxton on 10 April 2024, and referred to us that day. We met between 27 June 2024 and 22 May 2025 to consider it. We received written and oral submissions from the petitioner and NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi.

Committee members

Greg O'Connor (Chairperson)

Carl Bates (until 29 January 2025)

Kahurangi Carter (from 29 January 2025)

Greg Fleming

Paulo Garcia (from 29 January 2025)

Francisco Hernandez (until 29 January 2025)

Benjamin Doyle also participated in our consideration of this petition.

Related resources

The documents we received as evidence in relation to this petition are available on the Parliament website.

A recording of our hearing can be accessed online on the Parliament website.