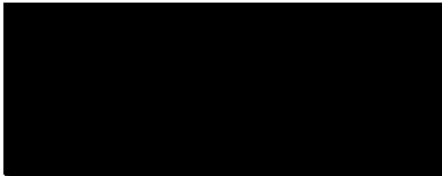





05 June 2024

C180348



Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your email of 9 April 2024 to the Department of Corrections – Ara Poutama Aotearoa, requesting information about offender transfers via airplane in the last five years. Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA).

You requested:

In the past five years, how many detainees, of both adult prisons and youth justice facilities, have been transported around the country via airplane?

As advised in our correspondence to you dated 23 May 2024, information for parts of your request relating to youth justice is considered to be more closely connected to the functions of the Oranga Tamariki, and was the request was partially transferred in accordance with section 14 of the OIA.

Public safety is our number one priority. Each year we carry out tens of thousands of prisoner escorts between prisons, courts, specialist medical facilities and rehabilitation providers. We use a variety of transport methods, including road transport, commercial flights and charter flights and all escorts are planned to minimise any risk to safety and security.

Every time a prisoner is required to be transported outside of the secure confines of a prison staff carry out a thorough risk assessment and we put in place security measures to mitigate any risk to the safety of the public, prisoners and our staff. This includes specifying the number of escorting staff, the transport method, whether the prisoner will be GPS monitored while outside of prison and the restraint type used.

The fastest method of transport between the North and South Islands is air travel. Prisoners may also be flown between North Island prisons. This process enables us to ensure that the time that a prisoner spends outside of a prison is limited, thereby minimising risk to the safety of the public. It also means that prisoners are not spending long periods of time in a cell inside a prisoner escort vehicle. Corrections Officers accompany prisoners on all air

transfers, and additional airport security staff and prison staff are stationed at the receiving airport.

- *Can I please have this information broken down into the total number of prisoners and the total number of transfers per year?*

Unfortunately, we cannot readily extract this information in the format that you have requested it from our electronic records as is not held in any readily retrievable format. To identify this type of specific information, we would be required to manually review a large number of files.

We have considered whether to affix a charge or extend the time limit for responding, however, given the scale of the request we do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of our publicly funded resources. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research. As per Section 18B we have considered whether consulting with you would enable the request to be made in a form that would remove the reason for the refusal. However, we do not consider that the request can be refined in this instance.

For the data we have provided in this response, please note that the data displays the number of offenders on a leg of each journey, i.e. if 12 people travel from Auckland to Wellington and one person also travels from Wellington to Christchurch, they are counted again on the next flight. Unfortunately, our data system does not allow us to separate these figures without looking through each individual flight record and is therefore considered not readily retrievable.

However, the total number of prisoners moved from 2019 to 2024 is 4,232, noting that some prisoners have been counted more than once if they were on more than one leg of plane journey as explained above.

The below table displays the total number of flights used for prisoner transfers from 2019 to 2024.

Total Flights	
Year	Total
2019	98
2020	61
2021	47
2022	51
2023	79
2024	14
Total	350

- *Of these transfers, how many were private chartered flights and how many were commercial flights?*

The tables below display the number of chartered and commercial flights from 2019 to 2024.

Charter Flights	
Year	Total
2019	21
2020	28
2021	23
2022	30
2023	25
2024	7
Total	134

Commercial Flights	
Year	Total
2019	77
2020	33
2021	24
2022	21
2023	54
2024	7
Total	216

- *Could you please provide the total cost of the plane transfers per year - including prisoners and Correction officers' flights, and any other costs included?*

We have decided to refuse your request for total costs of offender plane transfers under section 9(2)(i) of the OIA, to enable a Minister of the Crown or any department or organisation holding the information to carry out, without prejudice or disadvantage, commercial activities. We have considered the release of this information would impact contractual agreements and is commercially sensitive.

In accordance with section 9(1) of the OIA, we have also considered countervailing public interest relating to the release of the information including transparency and accountability, however we are satisfied that in this case, public interest considerations do not outweigh the withholding reasons outlined above.

- *Could you please provide a breakdown of the prisoners' ages and genders?*
- *Could you please provide a breakdown of the offending the prisoners had committed, or were alleged to have committed?*

The table below displays the number of male and female transfers via airplane from 2019 to 2024.

Female	
Year	Total
2019	100
2020	94
2021	33
2022	93
2023	51
2024	6
Total	377

Male	
Year	Total
2019	668
2020	663
2021	587
2022	625
2023	984
2024	328
Total	3,855

Unfortunately, we cannot readily extract each offender's age or offences from our electronic records as is not held in any readily retrievable format. To identify this type of specific information, we would be required to manually review a large number of files.

We have considered whether to affix a charge or extend the time limit for responding, however, given the scale of the request we do not consider that this would be an appropriate use of our publicly funded resources. Therefore, this part of your request is refused under section 18(f) of the OIA, as the information cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

As per Section 18B we have considered whether consulting with you would enable the request to be made in a form that would remove the reason for the refusal. However, we do not consider that the request can be refined in this instance.

- *Could you please provide a breakdown of which areas of the country the prisoners have flown in and out of?*

Offenders are generally transferred via airplane from Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. Once they have arrived at one of these destinations, offenders will then be transferred in a Prison Escort Vehicle (PEV) to their assigned prisons.

- *What was the purpose of flying the prisoners?*
- *Why were they flown instead of being transported via prison or youth justice facility van?*

As previously mentioned, the fastest method of transport between the North and South Islands is air travel. Prisoners may also be flown between North Island prisons. This process enables us to ensure that the time that a prisoner spends outside of a prison is limited, thereby minimising risk to the safety of the public. It also means that prisoners are not spending long periods of time in a cell inside a prisoner escort vehicle. Corrections routinely uses approved Airline Charter Companies for the purpose of transferring a larger number of prisoners around the country at any one time. Charter flight transfers are one way of allowing prisoners to be transferred safely, securely and humanely while minimising the risk to the general public.

Reasons for prisoners being transferred by airplane is predominately to manage the prison populations between the North and South Islands, and also for longer journeys to take pressure off our road network as each prisoner escort vehicle can only carry eight prisoners at a time.

Commercial flights are usually used for transferring female prisoners between three sites – Arohata Prison (Wellington), Auckland Region Women's Corrections Facility, and Christchurch Women's Prison – as we have no feasible road network to transfer women between these prisons due to distances involved.

- *What security measures are taken when flying prisoners?*

The safety of the public is our top priority, and thorough risk assessments and rigorous planning go into the transfer of any prisoner. Corrections plan for any and all contingencies when conducting prisoner transfers. Prisoners escorted by charter flight with the assistance of Aviation Security are safely and securely managed with the safety of the public being the highest priority. The reception/movements manager must determine, based on a risk assessment, the number of officers required for the transfer and if pepper spray is required. An officer who has achieved National Certificate of Offender Management Level Three NZQA Unit Standard Escort Prisoners must be assigned as the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the escort.

When organising a charter flight transfer, the National Manager Prisoner Movement, in consultation with the Regional Movement Co-ordinators and prison management, will take into consideration the category of the prisoner and level of restraint required for each prisoner. All prisoners assessed as requiring a waist restraint or handcuffs, must remain in the same restraint throughout the entire escort, including on board the aircraft, if agreed with by the charter company and Pilot in Command of the aircraft. A seating arrangement diagram for the aircraft must be prepared by the Principal Corrections Officer or delegated authority responsible for the escort, in consultation with the National Manager Prisoner Movement, as part of organising the escort.

For operational security reasons, we are not able to divulge the specific number of staff that accompany prisoners being transported by plane. However, Corrections always has the appropriate number of staff to ensure safety and security with prison transfers.

Please note that this response may be published on Corrections' website. Typically, responses are published quarterly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

I trust the information provided is of assistance. I encourage you to raise any concerns about this response with Corrections. Alternatively, you are advised of your right to also raise any concerns with the Office of the Ombudsman. Contact details are: Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Ngā mihi



Leigh Marsh
Commissioner Custodial Services