

Being cool and getting elected

I remember riding a scooter. I was a child busting my gut to get a two-wheeler, but some parents considered the scooter an essential segue from trike to bike.

They insisted we have one for training purposes, hoping to lessen the prospect of busted necks. They gave no thought to the deep uncoolness of those odd, wobbly, small-wheeled devices powered by one foot hitting the ground occasionally, utterly useless uphill but mildly exciting down.

There was small consolation in the ability to frighten the elderly as we darted around them on footpaths, which were the scooter's playground; even at a young age we understood riding on the road would be suicidal.

It didn't last long. Coolness is essential, and scooters didn't rate. Until now. It's taken countless decades, but they've finally made it. People are now busting a lot of things to be noticed on one.

The mayor is an early adopter of coolness and has been seen riding what I assume was an unpowered one around council offices. His picture on one of the deeply cool electric ones has appeared in the paper, along with his verdict that this new version is "very cool and exciting technology".

His comment was made during a meeting of the New Plymouth District Council's Te Hiringa Taumatua Committee, which was discussing an application from a couple of scooter entrepreneurs to trial a fleet of powered scooters on the coastal walkway.

I'm not sure I understand why that committee was dealing with scooters. The council website declares its role is to identify and discuss issues of cultural, economic, environmental and social importance to Māori in the district, so perhaps there is something about scooting considered particularly cool by tangata whenua.

Unfortunately, that same day the paper had another scooter story a few pages over, the account of a 49-year-old man who thought it was very cool and exciting to ride an electric scooter called a Lime (what a cool name) to work - until it locked up and threw him.

He ended up cooler than expected, in hospital with ice packs. He may not have been alone. It turns out Limes have a glitch that pitched so many Swiss people onto asphalt the manufacturer had to issue a general warning. Not cool.

I note councillor Harry Duynhoven backed the scooter application, comparing them with mobility scooters, which made a big difference for his father. Harry is a wheels man, of course. He and I got our picture in the paper last election hooning down the big ramp at Len Lye in wheelchairs while partaking in a "try disability day".

This is another election year. Being cool for the voters will be essential over coming months.

For those unwilling to scoot for votes, there's that familiar old saw, the rates rise. Was it sheer chance that adjacent to the scooter story was one telling us the rates rise this coming year will be lower than expected?

Not a big reduction, but still a coolish one for ratepayers. It will override any thoughts of how we can expect the council to pay for things like the big tent erected over its offices, the tanker

berth at Pukekura Park (and weeding), fixing Yarrow Stadium (which will need tens of millions when it's restored) and improvements to water and sewerage systems.

Mayor Holdom raised our fridity with his plan to sell off Fitzroy Golf Course land to kickstart a fund to pay for all the things we expect, but the principle behind his idea is still worth considering if we want the city to thrive.

Our rates are low in comparison with others. The average is probably a grand shy of what's needed to sustain even the basics. Past councillors held their seats by keeping rates rises low, and now Holdom is discovering the accumulated problems of aging systems. He understands infrastructure better than any mayor I've known, something especially important in the threatened energy crisis.

Before I scoot off (I know, I've over-punned...but it's addictive), a big up to the Māori committee for declaring that electric scooters should be banned in Pukekura Park. That's very polar for those of us who already struggle to get around there without being bowled by a cyclist or bitten by an unleashed dog.

The walkway is already a scary place, with some cyclists demanding ascendancy over pedestrians. Let's keep the park a cool and slightly less exciting haven for young and old.