

NEW ZEALAND (/NEWS/NATIONAL) / POLITICS (/NEWS/POLITICAL)

## Wellington's Sky Stadium offered as parking to free up Parliament streets blocked by protesters

2:08 pm on 14 February 2022

There's no sign any of the anti-mandate protesters are responding to police's pleas to move vehicles, with free parking space at Sky Stadium now on offer.



Protesters' vans and cars blocking Molesworth St outside Parliament grounds, and tarpaulin awnings set up on the road and footpath. Photo: RNZ

RNZ reporters say the streets are still blocked by cars and trucks that have been parked up illegally for days, and in fact more and more tents are being set up in surrounding areas.

The protest at Parliament is in its seventh day and is in a holding pattern as protesters refuse to move, and police continue efforts to identify and engage with any key leadership figures.

Police say they are not going to be able to arrest their way out of the protest and are focusing on ensuring public safety and clearing the streets.

There is no sign, however, of protesters are taking any heed with nearby streets still jam packed with cars and trucks.

Police said there had been discussions with the Defence Force about bringing them in to help move vehicles if protesters refused to move them, but it was an option they would prefer not to have to use.

Wellington district commander Superintendent Corrie Parnell said disruption to residents, schools and places of work was creating real stress and concern, and people were feeling unsafe.

Some of the crowd of protesters at Parliament. Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

"Overnight some protesters did move vehicles that were obstructing the roads which is greatly appreciated by police and the public," Parnell said.

"Sky Stadium has agreed to help by providing a safe parking facility for protesters vehicles from this evening. This is expected to be from 6.30pm tonight.





"Throughout the day, police will be providing the owners of the cars, vans, utes, campervans and trucks currently blocking roads with information that will explain how and when they can relocate their vehicles to Sky Stadium."

There would be a police presence at the stadium, Parnell said.

Sky Stadium chief executive Shane Harmon hoped to alleviate some traffic issues in the capital by providing safe parking for the vehicles of protesters.

He expected potentially 100 vehicles will take up the offer.

An area on the ground floor would be cordoned off for the protester's vehicles and have a police presence, Harmon said.

Police had agreed to foot the bill for the safe parking for protesters' vehicles, including additional security and cleaning costs, he said.

The commuter carpark would operate as normal.

Parnell said in the interim protesters were asked to relocate their vehicles from the road and into legitimate parking as soon as possible.

"Police staff will continue to be highly visible in and around Parliament grounds, to provide reassurance for all people. We have been supported this morning by Māori Wardens who have been centred around Wellington Railway Station.

"We continue to appeal to protesters to leave the demonstration and to take their children - it has been wet and cold overnight, and we now have concerns about the health risks posed and sanitation issues."

Wellington resident Chris Roberts - who lived directly over the road from Parliament - said the protesters were controlling the traffic in the central streets of the capital today.

Residents in his building had one exit option as there were cars and a kitchen in the middle of Molesworth Street and they had to negotiate with the protesters to get their cars in and out of the building over the weekend.

The protest seemed more subdued today, Roberts said.

### Failure to appear in court

Many of the anti-mandate protesters arrested on Thursday failed to appear for their first hearing in the Wellington District Court this morning.

However, a group was being served court documents, including bail bonds, outside the court house by court staff.

The protesters face charges of wilful trespass and obstructing police.

The registrar bailed most of them until March, with the condition that they were not to enter Parliament grounds.