

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

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Last weekend I drove to Queenstown to be MC at a Bingo tournament to raise money for Cure Kids, a charity that helps kids who get cancer. The event was organised by the wonderful St Moritz Hotel and thanks to them and their staff we raised over \$5,500. The hotel generously paid for my accommodation but I'm sorry, the petrol was paid for by the ratepayer.

Everything that Council is involved in is ultimately ratepayers' money. The recent local government delegation to New Plymouth was, "shock, horror", paid for directly or indirectly with ratepayers' money. Your roads, parks, theatres, sporting facilities, libraries, roads, drains etc are all paid for by ratepayers. Our Council alone spends \$1 million a week of your money. Do we like collecting rates? Like hell! We loathe collecting rates. We would prefer collecting the petrol and roading taxes and GST as they do in Japan rather than having a property tax.

In fact one year all the Mayors of New Zealand dressed up as highway robbers and rode around on horses as a protest against central government for collecting roading taxes, but only redistributing about a third of the money to local Councils to spend on roading.

Until the system changes Councils have no choice but to collect rates. I realise that for many of you a trip to New Plymouth may seem like the ultimate in luxury and extravagance, but personally I find flying and staying in hotel rooms quite stressful. There's always someone hammering on the door yelling "mini bar" or 'room service' or wanting to turn down your bed and give you chocolate. You're usually on a main road so it's hard to sleep because of the traffic noise, there's no fresh air and the air conditioning doesn't work properly. Then you spend all day listening to lectures about the impact of oil and gas.

Personally I'd much rather be at home, in front of the fire with the cat on my lap, reading a good book or watching the History Channel. That's what I call "luxury".