



Auckland Matters

The AA's Auckland infrastructure issues newsletter

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GUIDING LIFE'S JOURNEYS FOR OVER 110 YEARS.

New Zealand Automobile Association



ISSUE 4: ALIGNMENT ON AUCKLAND TRANSPORT?

From the policy team



With Auckland's fractious Long-Term Plan debate now out of the way, and the Council's Accelerated Transport Programme providing a temporary fix for the network

for the next three years, we have an excellent opportunity to pause, take a breath, and focus on building the long-term certainty around Auckland's transport programme that's still missing.

For some time now, the AA has been of the view that getting Auckland's 30-year transport strategy right will require local and central government to work together in a much more joined-up way.

That's why we were delighted to see the Mayor and the Transport Minister agree to work towards some form of alignment on Auckland transport issues.

This edition of Auckland Matters seeks to set out what the alignment could look like, drawing on conversations with a wide range of stakeholders. The idea is not to design Terms of Reference, but rather to outline what we think needs to be addressed, and some of the principles that should guide the delivery of the programme.

While the Council and the Government aren't going to resolve all differences overnight, we're optimistic there's a genuine willingness to look for common ground and make concessions.

We're also sure that the long-term benefits of alignment will justify any short-term delays – after all, it may mean more talking for the next year or so.

Barney Irvine,
Principal Advisor - Infrastructure

Introduction: Time to pick up the pieces

When it comes to transport, the relationship between Auckland Council and central government is a marriage that never really began.

Since tying the knot, the two sides have largely lived separate lives, occasionally coming together for public displays of affection or animosity.

Inevitably, the programme has suffered – big promises that have been made to Aucklanders have not been fulfilled. As a result, public frustration has reached boiling point, and confidence in transport decision-making has taken a big hit.

Aucklanders don't care who's more at fault – they just want to see local and central

government working together, and they want progress.

What is required is for the Council and the Government to go back to the start, get over the political and ideological differences, and find a way to make the relationship work. While that process is playing out – it's expected to take about a year, after terms of reference are agreed – there are a number of initiatives that can start immediately that will help to address the erosion of trust with the Auckland public.

What our Auckland Members are telling us

To better understand the views of our Membership and get a window into wider public sentiment, we've surveyed the AA Auckland Panel, a 100-strong focus group of AA Members from all across the city.

The feedback reinforces what we've learned from previous surveys:

- Auckland AA Members are deeply concerned about Auckland's congestion situation – which many feel is reaching crisis proportions – and about the inability of transport decision-makers to deliver on over-hyped promises
- While Auckland AA Members recognise that congestion is an inevitable consequence of the city's growth, they also believe that it's been aggravated by poor management of the network
- They lay the blame for this squarely at the feet of Council, and what they see as a track-record of strategic drift, over-spending and ill-advised decision-making
- Now, more than ever, Auckland AA Members want improvements to the network, and by and large they would be willing to pay extra to see them happen
- However, they'd need to trust that the spending was going to deliver results and that officials would be held to account. They resent the idea of paying more when Council doesn't appear to have its own house in order
- Auckland AA Members lack confidence in the Council to get the job done on its own. They therefore see strong central government involvement and a co-owned approach to Auckland's transport planning as essential

The Ten Priorities

The alignment should focus on the following ten priorities, many of which are more aspirations than concrete goals:

1 Mediation

From the outset, a mediator/facilitator is required to prevent the dialogue (and the steps outlined below) being stalled by 'baggage'.

The facilitator needs to be someone with technical and relationship-building skills, recognised as being independent from the Auckland debate, and respected both by officials and the public.

2 What does success look like?

The Council and central government need to develop a joint set of objectives for the Auckland network. The theme of "access" is common to both the Government Policy Statement and the Auckland Plan, and should be the central pillar of the shared vision.

While further work will be needed to decide exactly what "access" should encompass, and how it should be measured, we see the key elements as:

- Access to jobs within a certain travel time
- Congestion performance, based on vehicle speeds and travel-time reliability
- Growth in public transport use (in relative, not absolute, terms)

3 A realistic congestion target

Measuring congestion will entail a thorny discussion about what represents a realistic and reasonable congestion target, taking into account Auckland's growing population, growing economy, and constrained geography.

The challenge is not only to settle on a ballpark figure for peak and inter-peak congestion, but to help the public digest the unpalatable fact that Auckland's congestion is going to get worse, even with increased spending. In the minds of many Aucklanders, 1980s congestion levels remain the benchmark.

4 Reconcile visions for Auckland

There's never been a meaningful conversation regionally or nationally about what the Council's 'smart growth' vision means, or how it intersects with the central government vision, oriented more towards the traditional 'quarter-acre dream' and economic growth goals.

As a result, views between the two sides are polarised, and the assumption is that the respective positions are much harder to reconcile than they may actually be. The alignment process will need to identify areas of common ground, and use the transport debate to drive greater public engagement with spatial planning issues.

5 Is the plan good enough?

To address questions about the network outcomes on offer, a thorough review of the second Integrated Transport Programme is required. We'd support the Government's suggestion that this be carried out by a third party, potentially sourced offshore.

The review should take a strategic perspective, focusing on packages of projects and investment across whole modes and corridors, rather than individual projects, and re-visiting the link between transport



Create better connections and **accessibility** within Auckland, across New Zealand and to the world

-Auckland Plan, Chapter 13, Strategic Direction

A land transport system that addresses current and future demand for **access** to economic and social opportunities

-GPS, National land transport objectives and results



planning and land-use planning. It should identify where the extra investment is not delivering the goods, and what could be done differently to achieve better results.

6 Resolution on the CRL

The AA supports the concept of the City Rail Link (CRL), but support is tempered by the lack of clarity about what the project will deliver. Local and central government have conflicting views, and this uncertainty is standing in the way of greater public understanding and confidence.

The alignment should therefore help to ensure that there is no slippage with the 2017 time-frame for a joint business case on the CRL, and that the business case results in a shared position on the economic benefits, transport benefits, and benefit-cost ratios of the project.

7 Bi-partisan support

The alignment should be structured in such a way that it out-lives the three-year election cycle, to ensure that objectives and projects are not re-set each time a new government is sworn in. This will entail securing cross-party support, and officials should look to the Danish Transport Strategy – which seven out of eight parties in the Danish Parliament signed up to in 2009 – as a model.

It will also mean allocating the bulk of the technical work to a joint committee of senior officials – Auckland Council, Auckland Transport, Ministry of Transport, NZTA – with politicians taking an oversight role. This will help ensure the debate is driven more by what's best for the network than by politics (though an awareness of what's politically feasible would be essential).

8 Enhanced accountability

To enhance transparency and accountability, the alignment should establish an external auditing process, which the public can easily access. This would review the robustness of all project decisions, including both projects that have been approved and that have been rejected. Also, to demonstrate a track-record of sound decision-making, projects should be reviewed five and ten years after completion – BCR outcomes should be compared against initial predictions, and progress in relation to KPIs monitored.

9 Funding

Broad agreement on the plan must be accompanied by a joint position on how to fund it. Rather than seeking to make final decisions on funding, the focus should be on developing a framework to guide policy-making and public engagement on funding over the course of the programme.

This would set out how much extra Aucklanders will be required to pay, which funding models will be considered (we'd urge far more exploration of value capture mechanisms), and when decisions will be made. The aim would be to ensure adequate lead time for the funding debate, give users more clarity about costs and benefits right from the start, and guarantee that any plans for new charging systems in Auckland align with plans at the national level about the future of road-user charges and demand management.

10 Integration of data

In key areas such as congestion and population growth, Council and central government have often been working off different data sets and different input assumptions, and this has held the debate back. A much more integrated approach to data is therefore essential, with the recently established Joint Modelling Applications Centre (JMAC) – which aligns the data modelling work done by Auckland Council, Auckland Transport and NZTA – playing a key role.

Recommendations

While local and central government work out how to work together, the following principles should be adopted for the delivery of the programme, starting now, to help achieve cut-through with the public:

1 Get runs on the board

Achieving palpable progress early on will go a long way towards winning credibility in the eyes of the public. While discussion is taking place on the 'hero' projects, there are a number of smaller, less cost-intensive initiatives that can be advanced, and that will deliver significant benefit to the network. In particular, more resource should be directed towards:

- Variable lane directions on arterials during peak periods
- Remarking lanes at choke points on the arterial network
- Enhancing incident response capabilities
- Greater coverage of the network with monitored, variable traffic signals

These initiatives could be packaged in a new, branded entity, illustrating a fresh start for the programme.

2 Put the customer at the centre

Overcoming the trust deficit with Aucklanders will require officials to do more to put the customer at the centre of programme. That means communicating the benefits of the programme in a way that has meaning for the public – e.g. clear, measurable outcomes in areas like travel-time savings. It also means incorporating views that have been missing from the debate (such as those of South Auckland); being prepared to ask the hard questions, despite the potential political fall-out; and looking for opportunities to devolve decision-making so that there is an element of community ownership in the programme.

3 Focus on the reality, not the vision

Aucklanders have by and large bought into the Council's vision of a future network characterised by state-of-the-art public transport, enhanced mobility

and vibrant public spaces. What's lacking is an understanding of the reality behind it. How does the vision translate into an Auckland context? How much "transformation" can actually be expected in the network, and how quickly? What sort of trade-offs are required? What will the costs and benefits be, in concrete terms? The conversation with Auckland needs to focus on a practical and honest assessment of these issues – continued promotion of the vision will only delay and distract.

4 Embrace technology

Ultimately, any transformational change in the Auckland network will be driven by technology, rather than physical infrastructure. We'd like to see officials make sure the regulatory environment is as welcoming as possible for new technology and for innovation – in areas like journey planning, ride-sharing, in-car technology, and parking.

Officials should also realise the innovative potential of the market by tendering for solutions to transport needs, rather than tendering for the hardware to deliver pre-determined approaches.

5 Collaboration is a vote-winner

As has happened with housing, local and central government need to recognise that inaction in the face of Auckland's transport challenges is, in political terms, not an option. The public mood would suggest that the political spoils will go to the voice of collaboration, not confrontation.

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