



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 3: AUCKLAND'S TRANSPORT STRATEGY

From the policy team



As readers know, the big show in town for the Auckland transport infrastructure debate this year is the 10-year transport

budget, or Long-Term Plan (LTP).

Aucklanders are being asked to choose between the Basic Transport Network, which could be funded out of existing rates, and the Auckland Plan Transport Network, which would see ratepayers and motorists "pay more to get more".

Alongside the Council's public consultation process, we've carried out an extensive survey of our own, to provide a window into wider public sentiment. Around 6000 Auckland AA Members responded to an on-line survey, and we've also set up the AA Auckland Panel - a group of 100 AA Members from all across the city, who give us more detailed commentary on a range of transport issues.

This edition of Auckland Matters looks at the feedback we've received, and offers recommendations to help address the Auckland transport conundrum.

We hope it gets you thinking, and we look forward to being part of the conversation with you.

Barney Irvine,
Principal Advisor - Infrastructure

Introduction: What's Plan C?

Auckland AA Members are not sold on either of the budget options put forward in the Council's LTP, and the question we have for officials is: What's Plan C?

Feedback from our biggest Auckland survey to date shows that most Auckland AA Members are largely in the dark when it comes to the Council's transport agenda. When asked to choose, they prefer the Auckland Plan Network to the Basic Network, but support is muted, and softens when cost comes into play.

While Auckland Members appear to be opening up to the idea of paying more towards a new transport programme (a little more, at least), they will need far

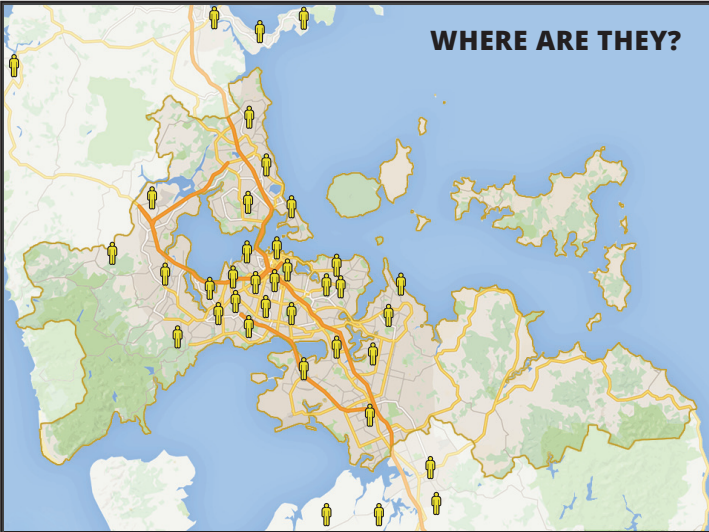
more confidence in the quality of the programme - and the financial management and accountability around it - before they're prepared to dig deeper into their pockets.

Persevering with the current options risks alienating a large chunk of the public that is already sceptical, and the onus is on officials to reconfigure their approach and deliver a programme that genuinely gets Aucklanders on board.

The Long-Term Plan: At a glance

	BASIC TRANSPORT NETWORK	AUCKLAND PLAN TRANSPORT NETWORK
CAPITAL COST	▶ \$6.9 billion	▶ \$10.3 billion
PROJECTS	▶ City Rail Link ▶ Highway projects (funded by NZTA) ▶ Limited investment in other roads, public transport, walking & cycling	▶ City Rail Link ▶ Highway projects (funded by NZTA) ▶ Significantly more investment in other roads, public transport, walking & cycling
CONGESTION OUTCOMES	▶ Congestion gets slightly worse over 20 years, then deteriorates further	▶ Congestion gets slightly worse over 20 years, then slightly improves ▶ Very small region-wide travel-time saving (12-77 seconds per day per household)
FUNDING	▶ Funded from the planned 3.5% average rates increase	▶ Additional funding of \$12 billion required, through: 1. Rates/fuel tax increase; or 2. Motorway User Charge ▶ On average, households would pay around \$350 extra per year, though frequent motorway users could pay \$1000-\$1500 per year

Introducing the AA Auckland Panel



WHERE ARE THEY?

WHO ARE THEY?

GENDER SPLIT: 57 38 AVERAGE AGE: 48

REGULAR MOTORWAY USER: 41%

REGULAR PUBLIC TRANSPORT USER: 38%

REGULAR CYCLIST: 12%

HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION:

WORRIED 9%
 CAUTIOUS 54%
 COMFORTABLE 35%
 ABLE TO INVEST 2%

What our Auckland Members are telling us

During February, we completed an on-line survey of our Auckland Members, and backed this up with a questionnaire, sent out to the AA Auckland Panel for written feedback. In both cases, our survey questions brought the costs and benefits of the two LTP options into greater focus than the questionnaire used by the Council in its public consultation document. **Here's what we found:**

1. Auckland Members are entering the game cold

Member feedback reflects what we've seen before: while the officials are treating this as the championship-deciding play, much of the public doesn't know there's a game going on at all. Close to 60% of Members rate their awareness of the Council's transport plans between one and three out of 10.

2. Desire for improved transport outcomes as strong as ever

Lack of awareness notwithstanding, Auckland AA Members are as anxious as ever to see improvements to the city's transport network, including large-scale projects that can change the mobility landscape. Above all, what they want is greater **choice**, so that they can move between the car and other modes, if they choose.



Typically many of those causing the congestion would take public transport if they could. Fixing Auckland transport therefore means providing more transport options.

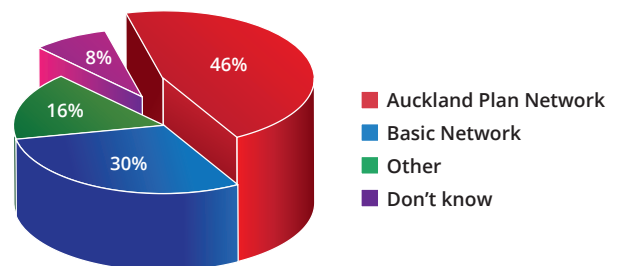
- AA Member

3. But they don't see the Auckland Plan Network as the solution

Our Auckland Members prefer the Auckland Plan Network to the Basic Network – 46% support vs 30%

support – but not to the point where it's seen as the solution to Auckland's transport future, or where a consensus could be built around it.

Which budget option do you prefer?



4. Reluctance to wear the cost...

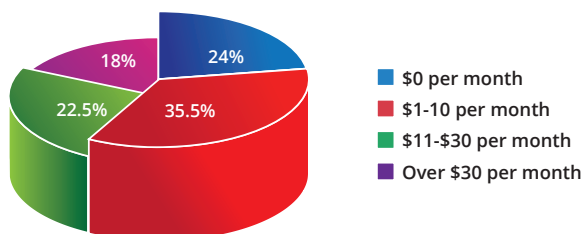
Further, support for the Auckland Plan Network doesn't translate into a willingness to pay. When asked how much they would be prepared to pay to avoid an extra 10 minutes of congestion each day, 23% of Auckland Members said they wouldn't pay anything at all; only 18% would be prepared to pay an amount equivalent to what's required under the Auckland Plan Network (\$30 per month, or more). This suggests a significant gap exists between stated support and actual support for the more expensive option.

The planned 3.5% average rates hike, and any prospect of increasing rates any further, remains deeply unpopular.

5. ...but they could be prepared to pay a little

Interestingly, however, 36% said they'd pay between \$1 and \$10 a month to ease congestion, and a further 24% said they'd pay between \$11 and \$30, suggesting that there might be an appetite for a "pay *a little* more to get more" approach.

How much would you pay to save 10 min of congestion per day?



6. Concerns about CBD-centrism

Nor are Auckland AA Members convinced that the Auckland Plan Network delivers sufficient benefits. Many question the choice of projects, which they see in terms of over-emphasis on the central city at the expense of the suburbs. The City Rail Link (CRL) remains a focal point for these frustrations.



The Auckland transport plan is all about servicing and concentrating everything within the CBD.

- AA Member



A train route around the central area will not have impact on traffic issues on the North Shore or in Penrose or anywhere else. It will only be used by a small subset of people who can already catch a train.

- AA Member

7. Congestion outcomes don't cut it

Auckland AA Members are also put off by the fact that the Auckland Plan Network offers only modest congestion gains when compared to the Basic Network, and that the congestion picture will get worse whether the money is spent or not.



At present all we see are pictures which lack the facts of actual travel saving improvements, the real costs of travel to me is completely missing. None of the Mayor's plans make sense or add value to the city.

- AA Member

8. Council needs to get its own house in order

It's also a question of trust. There is a strong perception among Auckland AA Members of wastefulness and excess

on the part of Council officials, and an equally strong sense that Council needs to get its own house in order financially – including management of transport projects – before asking the public to pay more.

Patience has worn thin with an approach that is seen to be about telling Aucklanders what will happen, without taking on feedback and without being held to account. Over half (54%) of AA Members surveyed rated the Council's performance in consulting on its transport plan between one and three out of 10.



They refuse to accept the financial black hole in their budgeting as their fault, and instead simply demand more from the public without first earning trust that it will be spent wisely.

- AA Member



It angers me that what people submit is ignored and the Council makes decisions behind closed doors. It is as though the Council is completely unaccountable to ratepayers.

- AA Member

9. If they were to pay more, user pays wins

As we've seen in previous surveys, Members appear comfortable with a user-pays approach, in principle. In a situation where they had to pay more, they'd clearly prefer motorway tolls over rates increases. However, Members still think that elements of other funding mechanisms – existing and new – should help make up any funding shortfall.

10. Central government a notable absentee

Many Auckland Members are aware of strategic and political misalignment between local and central government on Auckland transport issues, and see this as a barrier to a successful programme. Typically, they believe that greater central government involvement is essential, either by exerting greater leadership (strategic, financial, or both), or by working collaboratively.



Given the proportional population, and economic representation of Auckland to NZ there should be collaborative approach and agreement in planning and investment

- AA Member

Recommendations

Here are our recommendations for officials:

1. Reconfigure the approach

At this point, neither of the budget options put forward by the Council stacks up as both affordable and effective, or as capable of winning over the public. If Council were to try to forge ahead with its preferred option – the Auckland Plan Network – in spite of soft underlying support, it could well alienate a large cross-section of the public, and stall the momentum of the wider programme for the long term. Our first recommendation, therefore, is that a new approach is required – one that arrives at budget options by first addressing precisely the types of concerns articulated by our Auckland Members.

2. Stronger local-central government alignment

The cornerstone of any new approach should be strong alignment between local and central government. The Government remains openly sceptical about Auckland's transport objectives, and how it proposes to achieve them. We'd question whether the current debate about alternative funding mechanisms should take place at all when such a gap exists, especially when neither road pricing nor new fuel taxes can happen without central government sign-off.

A number of different parties, including Auckland Mayor Len Brown, have raised the possibility of some form of transport accord between Auckland and Wellington, and this makes good sense. The accord could be developed around network objectives that are common to the two parties, and a shared understanding of how those objectives are best achieved.

The theme of "access" could provide a suitable starting point – the Auckland Plan aims to deliver "A well connected and **accessible** city" while the Government Policy statement seeks to address "current and future demand for **access** to economic and social opportunities."

3. Review the programme

One of the first tasks of such an accord should be an independent strategic review of the Auckland transport programme. This should address key concerns raised by stakeholders – in particular, whether the congestion outcomes of the Auckland Plan Network (which fall well short of the Council's stated aspiration of "fixing Auckland's transport") and the strategic framework around the plan are up to scratch. Removing these question marks will enhance the credibility of the

programme, even if current project lists and time frames do not change materially as a result.

4. Listen to the quiet majority

The majority of Auckland AA Members clearly feel left out of the Council's transport planning process, and less than convinced about where it's going. Much more needs to be done to tune in to, and take on board, the views of Aucklanders who are not active participants in the debate, and to avoid being overly guided by the "squeaky wheels". Given latent public concerns, the City Rail Link is one project where this type of approach is essential.

At the same time, channels have to be found to demonstrate to currently disaffected Aucklanders that their views on transport issues have been heard.

5. Move more cautiously on alternative funding

In principle, the AA would be comfortable if a reconfigured programme considered some form of road pricing – we recognise the potential benefits and, as outlined above, our Auckland Members demonstrate a nascent openness to paying more to get more, though they would need to see tangible and meaningful congestion outcomes.

But, as the international experience shows, the lead time has to be far more gradual than the two-three years envisaged with the Auckland Plan Network. It needs to allow enough time for those who would be paying to process the options that are on the table, and weigh up benefits against costs. Moving too fast risks spooking the public, and making road pricing – and any gains it might offer – politically toxic.

Also, the starting point for the discussion should be how road pricing can best deliver network benefits. Currently, it's being proposed first and foremost as a means to fund a capital works programme; if, on the other hand, it was approached primarily for demand management purposes, it could make some capital projects unnecessary, cutting back the investment required.

For more information contact:

Barney Irvine
Principal Advisor – Infrastructure
T. +64 9 966 8608
M. +64 27 839 9309