



THE NEW ZEALAND
AUTOMOBILE
ASSOCIATION
INCORPORATED

Level 16
99 Albert Street
Auckland 1010

T. +64 9 927 2522

E. sgeard@aa.co.nz

28 March 2018

Long Term Plan 2018 / Auckland Plan refresh
Auckland Council
akhaveyoursay@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

Submission from the NZ Automobile Association (AA) on Auckland's Long Term Plan 2018 and the Auckland Plan refresh

Introduction

The AA is an incorporated society with 1.6 million Members, including approximately 330,000 personal Members who live in Auckland. Auckland AA Members are motorists, but many are also public transport users, cyclists, and, of course, pedestrians, and consequently AA Member views span across all modes of travel.

The AA's advocacy role in Auckland is focused on articulating our Members' views on transport matters and to ensure transport planning and decision making is in AA Members' best interests.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed direction of the Council's next 10-year budget (Long Term Plan) and its strategy to guide the long-term development of Auckland (the Auckland Plan); two documents that will have an important bearing on Auckland's transport system in both the short and long term. This submission focusses on the transport-related content of these documents, and draws on the findings of a survey of 2,345 Auckland AA Members, carried out in early March this year.

1. The consultation process

We are aware that factors outside the Council's control have made it challenging for the Council to develop the transport content of the consultation material for the Long Term Plan and Auckland Plan. Specifically:

- the draft Government Policy Statement on Land Transport, which will provide the Council with signals on where it should focus its transport investment if it is to secure co-funding from the Government, is yet to be released; and
- the Auckland Transport Alignment Project, which sets out the Government and Council's agreed approach to how Auckland's transport system should develop over the long term, is under review.

While we sympathise with the level of uncertainty the Council has had to work with, we are concerned with the effect this has had on the quality of the consultation process the Council has undertaken.

The consultation material that the Council has developed for the Long Term Plan is vague. It is not clear how much funding will be made available for transport, where all of the funding will come from, which transport projects will be delivered, or the outcomes that Aucklanders can reasonably expect from those projects.

All the same, on the basis of this information, the public is being asked to give its views on a new mechanism to fund the transport programme (a regional fuel tax).

We appreciate that consultation on the Regional Land Transport Plan has been decoupled from the Long Term Plan consultation to help provide a measure of transparency, but it does not change the fact that you are seeking an initial mandate on the regional fuel tax without giving Aucklanders an adequate picture of the quality of the programme. We will elaborate on this point later in our submission.

Consequently, we do not see this as a particularly fair or meaningful exercise in consultation. One thing we have seen regularly in our survey work over several years is a lack of trust and confidence in transport decision-makers on the part of AA Members, and our concern is that this consultation process will only reinforce that sentiment.

2. Congestion management

Congestion is the biggest problem that Auckland is facing – at least, that’s what our Members consistently tell us in their survey responses. It’s costing them in time and in money, and they consider it’s making Auckland a much less desirable place to be.

It’s therefore not surprising that Auckland AA Members identify ‘congestion management’ as far and away the priority when it comes to transport investment (see Figure 1), well ahead of other transport objectives like road safety, supporting housing development, reducing emissions and improving walkability.

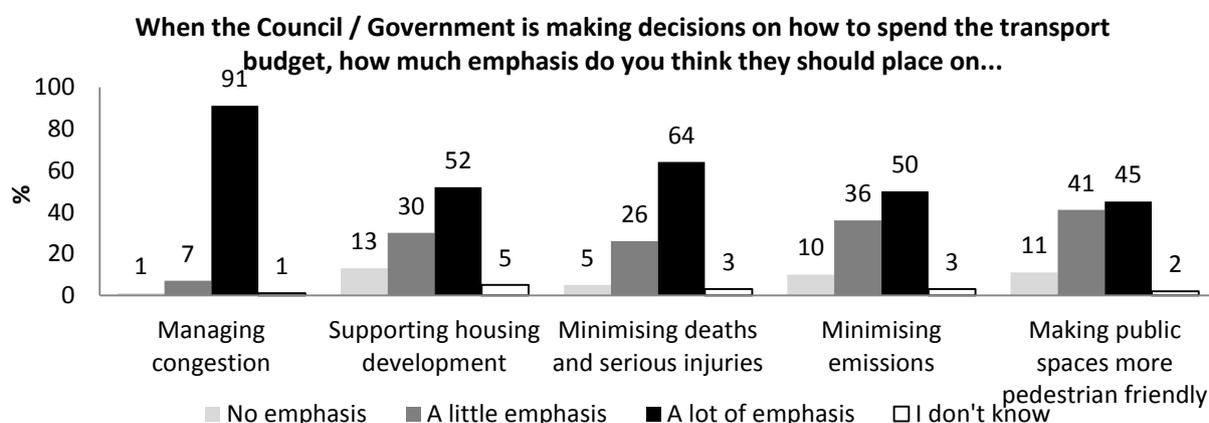


Figure 1 - Results from survey of 2,345 Auckland AA Members, March 2018

We are pleased to see that consultation material on the Long Term Plan leads with the Council's concern about congestion, but the statement of concern is not backed up by a statement of action.

The consultation material does not identify what the Council is working towards in terms of objectives and outcomes, nor does it give any indication of how the transport projects that it wants to deliver will help to manage congestion.

The closest the document comes to identifying a congestion outcome is to signal "...relative improvement in traffic congestion as a result of high quality rapid transit service..." – our Members, and the Auckland public at large, need much more detail and clarity about the transport benefits on offer.

What's more, the consultation material on the Auckland Plan doesn't mention congestion at all, which we find astounding given the status of the issue in the minds of Aucklanders. Instead, the document focuses on: creating an integrated transport system; increasing genuine travel choices; and maximising safety and environmental protection. While important, these issues in our view do not go to the heart of Auckland's transport challenge, or align with what the bulk of Auckland transport users are thinking, feeling and experiencing.

As two of the Council's key documents for influencing how Auckland will develop, the Long Term Plan and the Auckland Plan should do much more to put congestion management front-and-centre.

We challenge the Council to use the Long Term Plan and the Auckland Plan as opportunities to set a vision for what the Council will work to achieve in regards to managing congestion, and provide signals to Auckland Transport on how to achieve it. We recommend this involves identifying congestion targets, which will make clear to the public what the Council is working towards and provide a mechanism against which the Council – and Aucklanders – can track progress.

We will also be calling on the Council to make it clear how its priority transport projects – both individually and collectively – will assist in managing congestion.

3. Regional fuel tax

Our recent survey also focused on the Council's proposal to remove the interim transport levy and replace it with a regional fuel tax.

What we found was that 35% of respondents support the proposal. Another 20% indicate they are "neutral" to the idea, with free-text responses indicating that many in this group accept the regional fuel tax (or at least feel resigned to it), but have serious concerns over fairness, affordability and/or whether the money raised will be spent on initiatives that are worthwhile. Meanwhile, 38% of respondents oppose the proposal outright (see Figure 2).

How do you feel about the proposal to remove the transport levy and introduce a regional fuel tax?

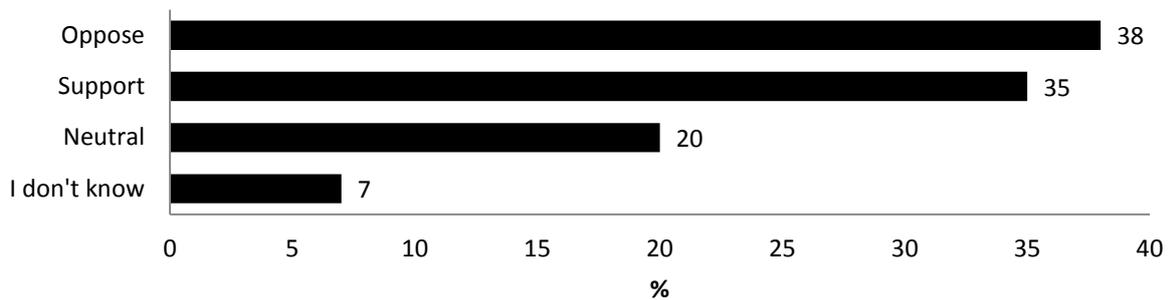


Figure 2 - Results from survey of 2,345 Auckland AA Members, March 2018

These results reinforce our view that a majority of Aucklanders are at least prepared to accept a regional fuel tax. However, that majority is slim and the acceptance is grudging, and there is still a lot of uncertainty and negativity.

If the Council hopes to develop stronger support for the proposal it needs to clearly demonstrate to Aucklanders what they'll get in return. Reiterating our comments above, this comes down not only to identifying which projects will be delivered, but also what these projects will achieve, particularly in terms of de-congestion.

Conversely, if the benefits are not seen by the public to stack up, uncertainty and negativity will increase, and current levels of support will fall.

As we have stated publically, the AA is not opposed to a regional fuel tax, provided there is adequate transparency and sufficient opportunity for Aucklanders to have their say – in this regard, the current consultation process leaves a fair bit to be desired.

In addition, our view is that a regional fuel tax should be reviewed after an initial period (say, one year) to assess its effectiveness and efficiency; that it should only be considered as an interim solution (eventually being superseded by a replacement to the Fuel Excise Duty); and that it should not be introduced anywhere outside Auckland.

4. Targeted rates

We also sought feedback from AA Members on whether they support the use of targeted rates to enable the delivery of more transport projects. While it is not explored directly in the Long Term Plan consultation document, we understand that one approach to targeted rates could involve property owners who live near a new transport project paying a special rate to help fund it, and this is the approach our survey focused on.

What we found was that our Members aren't comfortable with this funding mechanism: just 11% support it outright, with another 20% potentially willing to support it. Meanwhile, 61% oppose it (see Figure 3).

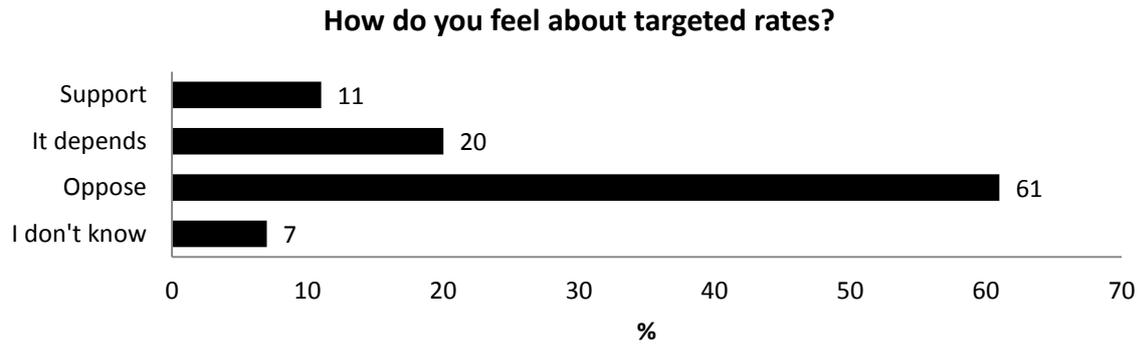


Figure 3 - Results from survey of 2,345 Auckland AA Members, March 2018

AA Members were quick to label targeted rates as ‘unfair’, pointing out that the amount people would have to pay would be in no way linked to their use of the new piece of infrastructure. We would therefore caution Council to tread carefully if this is indeed a funding path it intends to go down.

Conclusion

We are happy to discuss the content of our submission, including the findings from our Member survey, with the Council if that would be useful.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Geard
Senior Advisor – Infrastructure