

Auckland blue-print(s) a work-in-progress

"The Draft Auckland Plan, the CBD Master Plan, The Waterfront Development Plan and the Economic Development Strategy released by Auckland Council today represent a substantial step forward in the development of a fully integrated land use and infrastructure development plan for Auckland, but there is much work remaining to be done", says Stephen Selwood, Chief Executive, New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development.

"The plans are highly ambitious in nature and set out a bold vision for the future development of the city. Most Aucklanders support the need for a dramatic increase in investment in public transport infrastructure and the revitalisation of the waterfront and the central city as proposed in the plans. The creation of a liveable, walk-able city connected to the waterfront has captured the imagination of Aucklanders who have responded so positively to the opening of Wynyard Quarter and the celebrations on the waterfront associated with Rugby World Cup in recent weeks.

"While there will be almost universal endorsement of the vision, the plans do not clearly spell out how the vision is to be realised and funded. There is still considerable work to be done on integrating each of the plans into a fully cohesive, coherent and compelling development strategy for Auckland.

"Each plan has its signature infrastructure projects, such as light rail for the Waterfront Development Plan, heavy rail in the CBD Master Plan and combined western aligned road/rail tunnel in the Draft Auckland Plan, but it is not at all clear how these will work together or how they could possibly be funded given that there is already a \$10-15 billion deficit facing the council to deliver on its current transport plans.

"For the additional harbour crossing Auckland Council favours two western aligned 3 lane road tunnels running north and south, including provision for rail into the future. The tunnels would run parallel to the existing bridge and feed into Spaghetti Junction, while the existing harbour bridge would serve traffic heading to and from the city. The combined road/rail tunnel is predicated on development of rail to and through the north shore in the longer term. This will add significant costs to the tunnel crossing plus up to a further \$10 billion for rail on the north shore (\$30,000 for every Aucklanders living north of the bridge), none of which is factored into the budgets in any of the plans.

"Funding challenges aside, it is difficult to see how loading all traffic into the city on the western side, including diverting all traffic from the existing Harbour Bridge into Fanshawe and Cook Streets will contribute positively to a liveable, walk-able city centre, Wynyard Quarter and waterfront. Moreover there are significant strategic risks associated with a single dependence on Spaghetti Junction to distribute all motorway traffic for the region.

"NZCID considers an eastern aligned harbour crossing connecting at Grafton Gully warrants serious investigation in the context of the new plan for Auckland. This would provide two lanes for north-south traffic, complementing the existing two lanes through Spaghetti Junction, plus a third lane to provide direct connectivity to and from the port, the hospital, the university and the eastern suburbs. Whilst slightly longer, an eastern alignment provides better resilience, new connectivity and much better balance of traffic east and west of the city, reducing traffic flows on the western side via the existing bridge and creating opportunity for a more liveable walk-able CBD and waterfront.

"It is clear that Auckland needs further development of its rail network to serve the central business district and release the capacity of Britomart; however the economics of rail to the north shore, to the airport and from Avondale to Southdown will need substantial analysis. It is very unusual that the proposed CBD rail link does not serve the growth centre at Wynyard Quarter and existing demand generators such as the University of Auckland. Rail to Gaunt Street in Wynyard Quarter is provided in the plan but not until rail to the north shore is provided maybe in 30 or 40 years time.

"Meanwhile light rail is planned to support Wynyard Quarter and deliver a highly ambitious 70% mode share into the area while the proposed alignment for heavy rail under Albert Street duplicates the proposed CBD Master Plan alignment for light rail up Queen Street. While funding the central rail link is a challenge in itself, funding duplicate rail corridors within a block of each other represents a further significant funding challenge.

"The detailed development strategy in the Auckland Plan identifies 13 development areas across the city from Orewa in the north to Papakura in the south where low-medium rise 2-4 story dwellings and medium-high rise 3-8 story apartment blocks will deliver on the Council's plans for a compact city. The Auckland Plan requires a higher level of urban intensification than similar plans for Melbourne and Sydney over the next 20-30 years. What is not clear is whether or not this level of density will be supported by Aucklanders and whether or not the proposed rail and public transport system will be adequate to serve the mobility needs of these communities without substantial further investment in roads. In particular major new intensified developments in the Te Atatu Peninsular, Glenn Innes, Birkenhead, Northcote and Takapuna do not have adequate network capacity currently and will require significant new investment. Much of the intensified development is adjacent to existing motorway corridors which is likely to have a major adverse effect on congestion into the future in the absence of any alternative transport options being provided.

"The plans are generally sound in other infrastructure sectors including water, energy supply and telecommunications although considerable detail about how regulation will support timely investment needs to be developed within the unitary plan.

"An apparent gap in the major infrastructure projects that support future development of the city is the relatively small \$64 million per annum provision for storm water between 2011-2015. A recent report on storm water costs prepared for Auckland Council's environment and sustainability forum projected expenditure of up to \$9.9

billion will be required to support population growth over the next fifty years including \$5.4 billion to fix the ageing infrastructure, \$4.5 billion in new infrastructure for projected population growth.

"Pleasingly the Auckland Plan devotes considerable discussion to the various forms of funding that will need to be considered to enable the plan to be delivered, including new funding methods such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), and congestion charges or network pricing. It also proposes the use of Public Private Partnerships, council debt and various forms of development or growth levies.

"None of the debt financing methods are possible unless revenue can be raised to service debt repayments. The capital investment for transport in Auckland would consume the entire national capital transport budget for the next 10-20 years, depending on the level of investment finally decided upon.

"For this reason alternatives such as network charging or some other form of revenue funding will be central to the realisation of the liveable city vision. The development of a viable, prioritised and funded public sector investment plan is the cornerstone of the future development of the city and is the key to unlocking private sector investment to realise the bold vision set out in the plans released today. Without a credible funding and implementation plan the Council runs the risk that each of its aspirational plans released today will end up collecting dust on the shelves like the decades of regional planning documents that have preceded them", Selwood says.