

(NZCID Letterhead)

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Media release

New Auckland Council powerless claims debunked as 'rubbish'

Claims by ARC Chairman Mike Lee and others that the new Auckland Transport organization won't have to act in accordance with the requirements of the Auckland Council are wrong in fact and misrepresent the clear intentions of the new Auckland governance arrangements for the region.

In a March 9 Herald report, ARC Chairman Mike Lee cited demolition of the Kingdon Street railway station in Newmarket over the Christmas as 'a foretaste' of what Aucklanders can expect under the Super City. Claiming that although he is theoretically in charge of public transport services as chairman of the ARC, he found himself powerless to intervene against ARC's 'council-controlled organization – the Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) - and prevent demolition of the station.

However, Stephen Selwood, CEO of the New Zealand Council for Infrastructure Development (NZCID) said it had always been intended to operate the Kingdon Street station as a temporary station.

He produced an ARTA media release dated 8 January 2008, confirming that from Tuesday 29th January that year a temporary station would be built at Kingdon St to cover the period the new Newmarket Station was constructed.

"This clearly shows that closure of the station had always been intended, once the Newmarket Station was completed.

"That aside, there was in fact substantive consultation when the final decision to close the station was taken. Mr Lee went with others, including passengers and Newmarket Business Association's Cameron Brewer to meetings between ARC and ARTA over at least a month, and which took into account actual numbers of station users and the scheduled opening of a new Grafton Station nearby station before the demolition decision was finally acted on.

"The Auckland public is being misled into believing they are being locked out of key decisions that will shape the future of the city. Under the legislation that is proposed, strategic planning and policy decisions will be made by the Auckland Mayor and council, who will set the agenda, appoint directors, and then hold the Council Controlled Organizations to account in giving effect to those plans.

"The legislation setting up the new Auckland Council clearly stipulates that Auckland transport must follow the requirements of the Auckland Council as expressed through a Statement of Intent (SOI) and performance indicators (KPI).

"Of course, Auckland Transport will be able to enter into financial commitments without council approval, but only if these commitments are in line with the policy direction of the Council. If they're not then this would be a sackable offence by Directors.

“Clause 46 of the Bill prevents Auckland transport from borrowing any funds without the written agreement of the Auckland Council

“If Auckland Council wants Auckland Transport to hold public meetings and work closely with Local Boards and adopt a strong consultative approach when taking decisions, then this can simply be written into the SOI. The legislation makes it very clear that it is the Auckland Council’s role to set out arrangements to make the transport agency – and other CCOs – fully accountable to it.

“Reference in a Herald editorial (5 March) that the way things are shaping up the single mayor and council will be “a puppet show” is farcical nonsense. It shows a lack of understanding of the legislation as drafted and demonstrates no faith in the ability of Councillors to draft an SOI and key performance indicators that reflects their own policies and to be able to get accountability for performance against them by the CCOs. If the new Mayor and Councillors believe they will become ‘puppets’ if elected to the new Council, they will have only themselves to blame.

“Auckland wouldn’t be in this current mess if politicians had excised greater commitment to get results when they were running the services from council departments. It hasn’t worked, and it is time for a new approach and fresh start.”

At the end of the day, the reason Auckland governance is being reformed is because successive generations of politicians and the councils they should have controlled have failed to deliver the results expected of them for at least the past 50 years.

That is why it is critical that in the reform to just “one council” Aucklanders take time to elect councillors who have the ability to demand, and get, proper accountability from not just the CCOs but everyone who is part of Auckland’s new council arrangements.

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