

RESHAPING AUCKLAND CITY CENTRE

Despite undergoing massive growth and change in recent years. Auckland's city centre has been hampered by disagreement amongst stakeholders as to the best way to deliver necessary transport improvements in co-ordination with wider city centre projects. Auckland Transport (AT) has achieved significant success in developing a collaborative approach with major stakeholders on an integrated way forward which will deliver a thriving city centre for tomorrow. This paper will cover the complex challenges, the unique approach taken, and successful solutions achieved by AT, for a lessons learnt approach applicable to other transport agencies.

Author/presenter:

Daniel Newcombe, Manager Strategic Projects: Central, North & West,
Auckland Transport; MNZPI, daniel.newcombe@at.govt.nz

Tim Fitzpatrick, Manager City Centre Design, City Centre Design,
Auckland Council; tim.fitzpatrick@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

George Weeks, Specialist Urban Design, City Centre Design,
Auckland Council, george.weeks@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz

INTRODUCTION

Auckland's city centre has been undergoing massive growth and change in recent years. This raises the challenge of delivering the necessary transport improvements in co-ordination with wider city centre projects. The ongoing management of a growing city centre represents a challenge of a national scale.

Together with Auckland Council, Auckland Transport (AT) has achieved significant success in developing a collaborative approach with stakeholders on an integrated way forward which will deliver a thriving city centre for current and future users.

This paper will cover the complex challenges, the unique approach taken, and successful solutions achieved, for a lessons-learnt approach applicable to other transport agencies

Context

Auckland Council has a budget of approximately \$26 billion over the coming decade, of which approximately \$1 billion is planned for the city centre. Although substantial, this investment is dwarfed by Crown and private investments. The Crown is expected to invest around \$2 billion for the City Rail Link (CRL) project, and a similar amount for the planned light rail project. Private investment is more difficult to quantify but previous estimates put the total for city centre development at over \$10 billion over the next decade. Significantly, private sector partners have advised that their investment was only unlocked when key transport projects, notably CRL, were confirmed. This gave them confidence to make substantial, long-term investments in major city centre developments.

The city centre makes up only 0.08% of the overall area of Auckland, but has 14% of the region's employment and 17% of the region's GDP. As the hub of knowledge-intensive industries, the city centre is the fifth largest economy in NZ – after Waikato, Canterbury, Wellington (14%), and the rest of Auckland.

A successful city centre is important not just for Auckland but for the whole country. The city centre's high proportion of New Zealand's GDP is a function both of regional accessibility and city centre walkability, which leads to high job density and agglomeration. Access for large volumes of people to, from and around the city centre is essential for its ongoing prosperity. Additionally, there are substantially more people choosing to live in the city centre, adding further need for access to a wider range of activities.

The city centre experienced 13% population growth in 2017, compared with 2.6% regionally, and is projected to have 44% of Auckland's population growth in the coming 30 years. In that same period, it is also projected that the city centre will provide 25% of future job growth. There were 10,317 new residential building consents issued in the 12 months to September 2017, which is 2.9% higher than the previous 12 months.

All this growth has led to transport pressures. Whilst traffic volumes have remained fairly constant, public transport usage has doubled since 2001. There were 1.8 million cycle trips last year, up 3.7% on 2016, and a 35% increase in city centre pedestrian volumes was measured between 2010 and 2015. A 65% increase in travel demand to the city centre is anticipated over the next 30 years.

Further investment in public transport capacity is underway. Significant effort is underway to roll out a new bus network which includes new consolidated bus routes and facilities within the city centre. The majority of public transport customers to the city centre from most areas will continue to be carried by bus, even with additional investment in other modes, so effective bus operations are critical for the city centre. Two new light rail lines are proposed connecting to the city centre - one to Māngere and a later one to Kumeu. The New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) is responsible for delivering these lines. Within the city centre, the current assumption is that the lines will run

along Queen St between Karangahape Rd and Customs St.

On top of the challenges of a rapidly growing city centre, increasingly major events will be added to the mix. 2021 will be a milestone year, with the America's Cup, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference and major cultural events (such as Te Matatini). This will add extra pressure to transport networks, impose constraints on their operation and bring additional media attention. In particular, APEC will require significant closures of streets for motorcades and security blockades, along with significant additional activity at certain venues.

Coping with challenges

Looking across the ten-year programme for the city centre, each year will see major public and private construction occurring (see Figure 1 for extent of currently known developments). The programme will focus initially on the waterfront area for the delivery of the Downtown programme and America's Cup development. This will largely be complete by 2021, with a further programme for developing in the ferry wharf area after the Cup has been held.

A significant issue is the ongoing delivery of CRL, expected to continue to around 2023, and the yet-to-be-confirmed timeframe for light rail on Queen St. The light rail project team is working with the Council team, but the delivery timeframe, process and interactions are likely to have a significant effect on planning for the wider city centre programme.



Figure 1: Summary of public (dark blue) and private (purple) projects projected in coming decade

Following a pause for major events in 2021, the city centre programme largely moves to the Midtown area, for completion of the CRL Aotea station, Wellesley St bus upgrade and Victoria St linear park.

The challenges facing the city centre are primarily being dealt with by Auckland Council and AT, along with other Council organisations. There is a cross-Council governance structure established to manage the tasks and decision-making for the wider city centre programme.

This overall work is primarily led by an updated Auckland Plan and further work on the City Centre Masterplan (CCMP), the primary document for outlining the vision and implementation plans for the city centre. This work aims to provide an updated view on the transformation of the city centre. This includes increasing genuine travel choices and access to employment and social opportunities, providing accessible infrastructure that enables people to be active, connecting people, goods and services to where they need to go and improving amenity and the quality of urban areas.

The programme being developed by the Council and AT aims to increase attractiveness for city centre investment, increase investment opportunities for Māori, and enable the development of new homes. There is also an emphasis on improving the environment, enabling greater social cohesion, showcasing and protecting Māori heritage and wahi tāpu, and attracting market talent to Auckland.

The emerging plans for light rail along Queen St are likely to include substantial reallocation of road space away from general vehicular traffic towards the urban realm that is able to be used by pedestrians and people on bikes, with some requirement for limited vehicular access for servicing, loading and emergency access. During the 2012 CCMP public consultation, Queen St pedestrianisation was the most highly-supported proposal by the public (though this concept was never tested), so the light rail project represents an opportunity to implement this highly-supported concept.

AT has always intended that Queen St is not a key traffic or bus corridor. Queen St has had various roles in linking parts of the overall transport network, although this has changed over time (e.g. some sections currently accommodate bus services diverted from Albert St due to CRL works). AT recognises that Queen St is however a critical pedestrian route; since the completion of the 2006-2008 streetscape upgrade, traffic signal operation does not support the route as a speedy traffic option, reducing traffic volumes and speeds. There are no driveways or general parking on Queen St between Quay Street and Mayoral Drive (only loading zones and bus stops), though traffic often uses Queen St to access nearby parking buildings and side streets.

Construction and operation of light rail will significantly alter east-west traffic movement along and across the Queen St valley and in adjoining streets. This is in addition to other temporary or permanent network changes, such as new bus lanes, cycle lanes, quality streetscapes and other operational changes in the area. This presents a challenge in terms of maintaining access to and around a growing city centre with less space available.



Figure 2: Illustration of possible light rail concept for Queen St from recent AT material

There is an opportunity to anticipate the effects of forthcoming city centre disruption, particularly light rail construction, and identify how it can be mitigated and aligned with existing and emerging plans, priorities and strategies for the city centre. Additionally, there is an opportunity to use the catalyst of the disruption to create an entirely new access and circulation network for the city centre.

A new concept is being developed and assessed to address the issues and opportunities associated with this fast-changing picture of future access to Auckland's city centre. The concept is called Access for Everyone (A4E). It is based on examples used successfully in cities overseas, such as Delft and Barcelona and under consideration in Melbourne.

The overall aim of A4E is to ensure that whilst everyone who needs to get to and around the city centre is able to do so, the central core is more heavily focused on pedestrian activity. A4E would restrict private motor traffic movement in the city centre with a system of access zones (refer to Figure 3). These would restrict private motor traffic movement and, in doing so, generally discourage unnecessary vehicular travel – so reduce traffic flows.

This assumed reduction should make non-discretionary vehicular trips (deliveries, etc.) easier and more predictable, as well as allowing for road space reallocation to walking, cycling and public realm. Buses, pedestrians and people on bikes would be able to pass easily between zones, but vehicular traffic would generally be required to take restricted routes back to a circulation area to access another zone.



Figure 3: Simplified concept of Access for Everyone from Council material

Another concept being developed for assessment is a revised view of the future of the Quay Park and Grafton Gully area, to the East of the Downtown East zone shown above. The 2012 CCMP proposes capping the motorway in Grafton Gully and a new urban hub within Quay Park. Progress was limited on that concept, as the future of the adjacent port was unresolved. There is now consensus that the port will consolidate eastwards and then vacate its current site within the next 30 years, which allows for greater planning for the transitional and then post-port future.

Current concept development includes consideration of an urban boulevard along the current State Highway 16 corridor, to allow more comprehensive redevelopment of surrounding land uses, whilst still allowing it to be a core freight corridor (refer Figure 4). Other concepts are looking at major land use changes in the area currently constrained by an array of rail infrastructure. As Auckland's rail network develops, this infrastructure will change, so the concept planning will seek to use this opportunity to reshape that area.

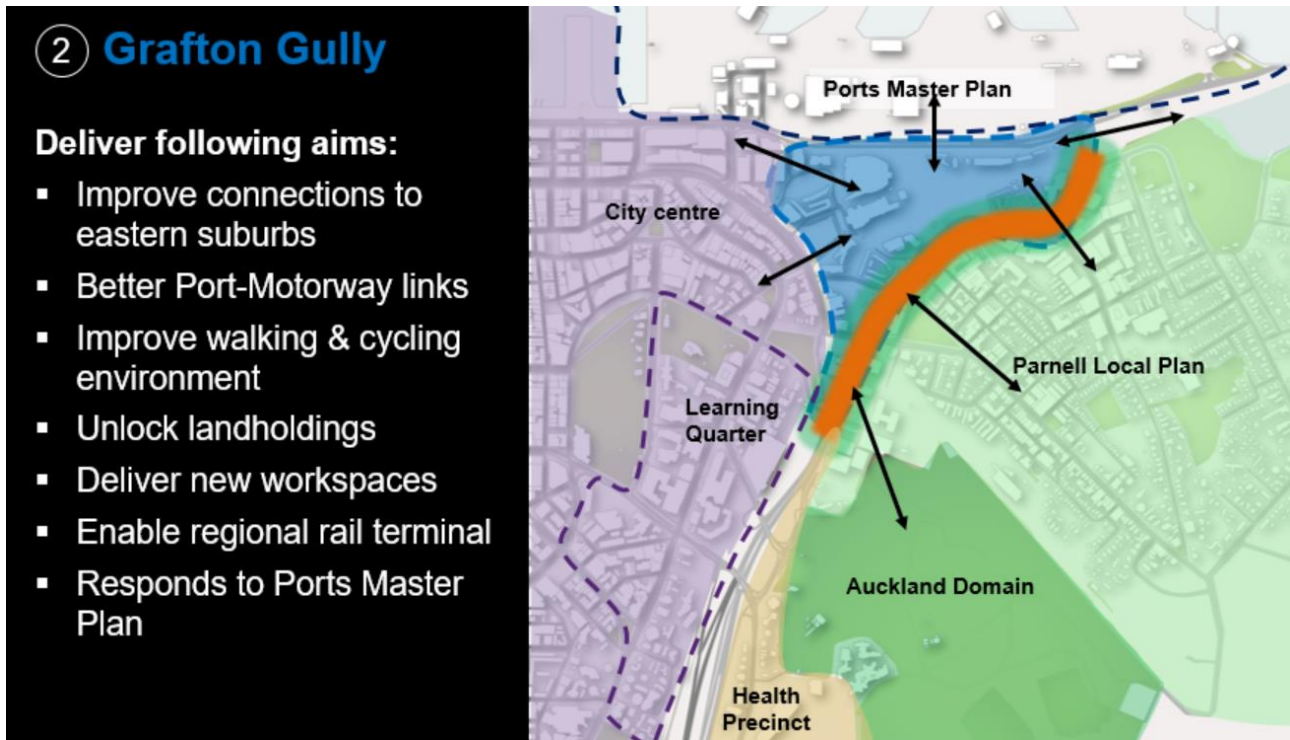


Figure 4: Grafton Gully context from Council material

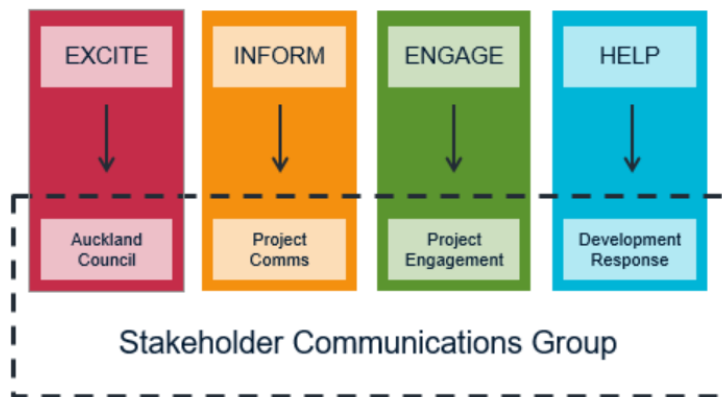
A final focus area for the CCMP update is on Māori outcomes, an area that was underdeveloped in the original CCMP. Given that Auckland is uniquely placed as the only global city with Māori heritage, there is a huge opportunity to deliver Maori outcomes that have benefits for all Aucklanders in the planning and design of the growing city centre. The Mana Whenua Kaitiaki Forum is developing a Mana Whenua Kaitiaki Forum Māori Outcomes Plan for the City Centre and Waterfront. The Auckland Design Office is currently helping them with this. It will subsequently help the Kaitiki Forum to align the Outcomes with the refreshed CCMP. These processes are not expected at this stage to affect transport outcomes.

Communication

As part of developing a new vision for the city centre and managing ongoing disruption, the Council family is focusing on a new communications approach. This will seek to excite, inform, engage and help city centre customers (see Figure 5).

The plan is to provide a single 'live' view of stakeholder communications activity across the city centre, manage communications, engagement and development response together, give a standardised consumer experience and have a shared media channels strategy and creative approach.

Communication roles



A dedicated communications team delivering:

- ✓ Single 'live' view of stakeholder communications activity across the city centre.
- ✓ Communications, engagement and development response managed together.
- ✓ Standardised consumer experience - tone, look and feel across all communications
- ✓ Shared media channels strategy and creative approach.

Figure 5: Communications overview from Council material

Disrupted traffic, bus, cycle and walking movements associated with both public and private construction projects will put further pressure on the city centre street network, which will always need to accommodate delivery and servicing requirements. Ongoing disruption also risks creating 'construction fatigue' for businesses and residents, and the need for additional effort to maintain a vibrant and engaging city centre.

The communications team recognise that development of the city centre will come with disruption, and, if Aucklanders are to accept change, they'll need to feel it's worth it. Therefore, the focus will be on showing Aucklanders what their future life in the city centre looks like and make the city centre development simple to understand and navigate. A shared digital platform will be developed, with a particular focus on mapping to help guide city centre users around ongoing construction sites.

Supporting Aucklanders through change

As well as using the digital platform, with the city centre development story in one place, across all projects and programmes, a new approach is planned for construction site hoardings. It is recognised that the extent of hoardings represent a huge advertising opportunity and is a valuable space to convey the benefits of development and provide messages to mitigate consequences of the disruption. Figure 6 shows an example of a hoarding with local information and adding to the amenity of the construction area.



Figure 6: Example of engaging hoarding design at a construction site

Given the scale of disruption imminent in the city centre, AT has proposed that a dedicated city centre travel demand management (TDM) strategy in Auckland would be a critical factor in supporting ongoing growth and activity. The principles and opportunity of TDM are well understood in Auckland, however current programmes are uncoordinated. A coordinated approach – developing an overarching TDM strategy to manage the impact of the disruption across the whole city centre – would add value to the existing programmes and operations. It would help ensure:

- Auckland remains accessible and easy to get around
- and is perceived as being accessible and easy to get around;
- everyone can access employment and services, planning their journeys around the disruption;
- businesses are able to continue to attract and retain the best people, and invest in the city centre; and
- the infrastructure investment results in more sustainable patterns of travel to, and within, the city centre.

In order to conduct travel behaviour change and development response activities more extensively across the city centre, Auckland Council and AT are seeking support to establish an integrated TDM and development response team. This team will provide strategic advice and expertise across a range of functions including:

- Communications and engagement
- Strategic planning

- Operations management
- Business support
- Activation
- Behaviour change
- Wayfinding
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Funding

The team is seeking the mandate to implement actions across the city centre to respond in a co-ordinated way to upcoming infrastructure development to ensure a successful legacy for the community. The overview of action areas is shown below:



Figure 7: Development Response summary

A coordinated city centre TDM strategy would involve transitioning the focus of the current TDM initiatives from a project-based, reactive model to a customer focussed, network-wide, one voice, proactive model. This new approach would be designed to support and encourage current as well as future travel behaviour change towards use of sustainable modes. The holistic, customer-centric framework would incorporate the activities of multiple partner agencies, so the impact and response to planned disruptions can be proactively managed.

The AT team are already working on a number of supportive programmes, including:

- Cargo bike trial
- Loading zone surveys
- Servicing and loading surveys of businesses
- AT Park app rollout
- 'Tradie' parking in AT carpark buildings
- Travel planning with relocating city centre businesses
- Ongoing travel planning with Travel Management Associations and Universities
- Tower block travel campaigns, triggered by CRL works
- Auckland-wide TDM campaigns with some city centre links

Lessons learnt

Whilst the work to develop the refreshed CCMP is still underway, there are a number of lessons able to be learnt already.

The first is the importance of collaboration. In 2017 there was significant pressure upon AT and Auckland Council to show collaboration, following conflicts between projects and priorities. The team worked hard to understand each other's perspectives and desired outcomes, and then discussed how to achieve them. This involved compromise and revision of previous plans. It is

expected that the upcoming refresh of the CCMP will similarly require the Council family to collaborate, articulate the outcome sought (rather than the specific projects) and find a suitable compromise.

The second lesson is the importance on having agreed data or goals. The city centre is changing rapidly, but the type of changes, their speed and their implications are critical to creating a robust and appropriately focused plan for the future. This includes understanding how the increasing number of city centre users need to get around and preferences for how they experience the city centre. Increasingly AT is more aware of the importance of 'place' as opposed to movement, and the variety of ways in which to enable this. This includes consideration of greater use of the street for uses other than transport, such as for events or activation (e.g. pop-up activities).

Conclusion

Auckland's city centre has been undergoing massive growth and change in recent years, and it is increasingly difficult to co-ordinate necessary transport improvements with wider city centre projects. Together with Auckland Council, AT has achieved significant success in developing a collaborative approach with stakeholders on an integrated way forward which will deliver a thriving city centre for current and future users.

This includes working with stakeholders on emerging opportunities across the city centre, notably Queen St and the Quay Park area, and to give greater to focus on Māori outcomes. The complex challenges, which continue to evolve, are being met by a collaborative approach between AT and Auckland Council. This work, and any successful solutions achieved, should provide lessons for other transport agencies.