

# **Paper to the Wellington Mayoral Forum: 30 May 2003**

## **Regional Urban Planning: A Sustainable Urban Development Framework**

### **Purpose:**

- To discuss the idea of an integrated regional urban form/ development framework;
- To bring the Mayoral Forum up to date on context/ initiatives to date;
- To identify potential links with the formal transport planning process;
- To suggest a possible way forward for discussion by the forum.

### **1. Crafting a Sustainable Urban Development Framework**

The Wellington region does not have a collective documented perspective on the long-term desirable form of development, the location of activities and the links with transport planning decisions. Nor does it have an agreed planning process that could be followed even if a collective approach was considered desirable.

The links between urban form and achievement of transport objectives is generally recognised and endorsed by all local authorities but there is, as yet, no clearly agreed process for linking this to the regional land transport planning process. The Greater Wellington Regional Council is however working to ensure the transport modelling process is more responsive to testing various urban form scenarios, rather than assuming a more or less static model based on existing District Plan provisions for each Council.

For the purposes of this paper reference to the Wellington region means the area covered by the Wellington, Porirua, Upper Hutt and Hutt Cities and the Kapiti Coast District Council.

#### **1.1 Benefits of a Collectively Agreed Framework**

In early 2002 a two day 'enquiry by design' process was organised by Wellington Council as part of its Northern Growth Management Planning process. The focus was on the 'western corridor' from Wellington City to Kapiti Coast. Officers from the councils lying along the 'western corridor' (Wellington and Porirua Cities, Kapiti District and Greater Wellington) were invited to attend the informal two day workshop to explore the bigger picture along the corridor, as a

precursor to the Wellington City Northern Growth Management process. Officers from Hutt City and Upper Hutt City were also invited.

The group identified the following issues:

- the cumulative growth expectations across all the Councils was well in excess of the likely growth – even if the most optimistic growth scenarios were used;
- Councils were competing for growth and for infrastructure, especially social infrastructure, rather than seeing how each part of the region contributed to a viable and sustainable urban system overall;
- competition for growth and lack of management of that growth meant brought stresses, strains and costs across the system. Costs included:
  - infrastructure investment issues;
  - the economic impacts of congestion and poor access.
- there was a need to make a shift to ideas of sustainable urban form both at the local and regional level. This included looking at:
  - how densities and nodes could be used to support public transport;
  - how new population could be managed to support existing communities;
  - looking at how industrial and commercial land could be redeveloped or released to encourage a local economy which was robust and flexible, while recognising the ‘specialities’ of each area.

The benefits of exploring this kind of regional urban form overview can include:

- reduced pressure on the transport system;
- more efficient use of existing infrastructure investment;
- development of population thresholds that support local community services;
- improved ability to withstand external economic and population changes;
- avoidance of duplication of planning effort.

## **1.2 Positioning the region relative to central government resource allocation**

The government adopted a Sustainable Development Strategy: Programme for Action earlier this year. One of its four priorities for

action was ‘sustainable cities’. In terms of the detailed action programme the focus is undoubtedly on the problems facing Auckland.

For Wellington, the most notable aspect is that central government is making clear that the concept of ‘sustainable settlements or cities’ is at the forefront of its thinking. This includes an emphasis on integrated planning.

The Wellington region has a significant opportunity to position itself as a place where the urban area already exhibits many of the sustainable urban form features that central government is seeking for Auckland. The region can be presented as a ‘sustainable city’ where the challenge is to maintain and build on the features that are already there. Rather than seeking central government resources by arguing that Wellington has similar problems as Auckland but perhaps on a smaller scale, the argument might focus on the risks and pressures which might begin to dismantle what already works well.

Obviously this kind of approach needs to recognise that there are development issues that do need to be managed. A first step would be to develop the collective framework and perspective which would form the basis of a clear statement of direction and action. This can be a powerful tool as has been proven in Auckland with the development of the regional growth strategy.

### **1.3 Relationship with Regional Transport Planning.**

The local authority input into the regional land transport planning process is largely built out of cumulative District Plan provisions without an overall picture of desirable regional form and development. There is no clearly articulated overall picture which forms the basis for the testing of various transport scenarios. There is a very real need for local land use decisions; e.g. retail activities, commercial land, employment centres, to be made with an understanding of transport impacts.

The overall urban form picture would need to be developed in a way that was fully integrated with the roading and rail systems, the ports and the freight systems. Once developed, this framework would be the starting point for the transport planning work. It would provide regional transport planners, in conjunction with local transport planners, with an agreed framework which is more than the sum of individual District Plan land – use planning decisions.

The current regional land transport planning process is well advanced but there is potential for an iterative process. Discussions would be needed to see how a process for developing a regional urban form or development framework could be integrated with the statutory transport planning processes, including planning for the state highway system.

Kapiti Coast District Council has also embarked on a process with Transit New Zealand which adopts community planning workshops (linked to the LTCCP process). These workshops are intended to identify a range of options for SH1 between Raumati and Peka Peka which the community, the Council and Transit agrees would be tested through the normal technical analysis process undertaken by Transit New Zealand.

This is a highly significant move in terms of an integrated, more community driven process with Transit. It will be undertaken during July and August 2003. Should it prove successful and Transit is comfortable with the process, it may also be able to be used elsewhere in the region.

#### **1.4 Implications for Each Area**

Would development of a regional framework undermine the ability of local communities to manage their future? The LTCCP processes undertaken by each Council provides them with the opportunity to identify what is important to their community. This is a starting point for building a regional framework. Provided the framework has taken account of the characteristics of each area and developed an overall picture of desirable form, this still leaves local communities with the ability to develop the detail of what that means for their areas. It may however result in communities reviewing some of their assumptions and looking to gain overall benefit and reducing costs and pressures. It might mean that a community that has depended on the spin-offs from high growth may need to shift to a focus on achieving a more balanced local economy. That shift would probably be needed in any case as the costs of the status quo approach become more and more obvious.

## **2. Initiatives to Date**

Since the Wellington City Council initiated the western corridor process the following has occurred:

- discussion of the idea of co-operation around urban form and development across the region with the CE's group. It was felt that a low key approach at first was appropriate. – endorsement was given by the CE's group;
- formal establishment of an officer group reporting to the CE's group which was expanded to include Hutt City and Upper Hutt City. It also includes officers from Greater Wellington. Two officers from each Council attend and the group includes the GW officer responsible for the regional land transport planning process;
- officers have participated in a joint workshop process to look at the regional availability and approach to provision of industrial/

commercial land – focusing on the WCC northern growth area and the Seaview area of Hutt City.

- the group has not met yet during 2003 – key issue is resourcing and availability of staff.
- as noted above, subsequent presentation to each Council - with support for a collective exploration of the issues resulting.

### 3. Possible Next Steps

The initial discussions in the officers' group identified a number of issues that needed to be explored if a more collective regional framework was to be developed. The list is shown below; it is not exhaustive and is only a very preliminary review.

#### **Understanding the Overall Urban System:**

- retail catchments, housing markets
- impacts of access issues on economy
- local issues and pressures affecting the overall system
- factors increasing commuting
- level of zoning for growth – review against realities
- cost impacts of growth without good local form
- industrial and commercial land realities

#### **Developing A Picture:**

- management of densities
- links to public transport
- social infrastructure needs – local communities
- key development sites within each area – timing and nature of development
- what is 'good local and regional form'
- links to LTCCP process and community outcomes

During late 2002, it was agreed with the CEs group that work would be undertaken to bring elected members together from across the region to explore an 'enquiry by design process' in an informal way.

This has not yet happened. A key issue is that a relatively informal process tends to take second place to other work that is undertaken by officers. The absence of a required long-term deliverable means that the ability to bring people together is constrained.

It is recommended that:

- the city and district councils, and the regional council, work together to develop a regional urban development framework;

- a target of June 2005 is adopted for the production of a regional urban development framework;

that the work is undertaken with:

- an analytical focus on sustainable urban form and sustainable development;
- consideration of links with and benefits deriving from the central government sustainable cities priority programme;
- a clear focus on the integration with the regional land transport planning and State Highway planning processes;
- involvement where relevant of central and regional agencies such as Housing New Zealand and hospital boards;
- integration with LTCCP processes.

the CEs group develop:

- a proposed structure for reporting to elected members and for management of the process – to be reported to the mayoral forum by 18 July 2003;
- a proposed work programme – to be reported to the mayoral forum by 29 August.

that the proposal be reported formally to each Council by the respective Chief Executives prior to 18 July 2003.

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