

Report 12.194
Date 07 May 2012
File WRS/09/01/01

Committee Wellington Regional Strategy Committee
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Submissions received on the Wellington Regional Strategy in the Draft Long-Term Plan 2012-2022

1. Purpose

This report provides an overview and highlights the key issues contained in the submissions that Greater Wellington received on the Wellington Regional Strategy as part of the Draft Long-Term Plan 2012-2022.

2. The decision-making process and significance

No decision is being sought in this report. This report provides a summary of submissions received for your information.

3. Background

Greater Wellington's proposed Long-Term Plan 2012–2022, and associated summary document was released for public consultation on 26 March 2012. A proposal to continue the Wellington Regional Strategy activity formed part of Greater Wellington's proposed Long-Term Plan. The proposal to 'Continue the Wellington Regional Strategy activity' is appended as **Attachment 1**.

The proposed Long-Term Plan was made available on Greater Wellington's website, and sent to a list of key stakeholders and interested parties (around 300 in total). A summary of the proposed Plan was distributed to all households in the region. The summary identified the key proposals in the plan over the next ten years, including the Wellington Regional Strategy activity.

4. Submissions

4.1 Summary

In total 980 submissions were received that pertained to the Wellington Regional Strategy activity. The number of submissions grouped according to those who supported or opposed the continuation of the Wellington Regional Strategy is as follows:

Support	587
Oppose	381
Unsure	<u>12</u>
Total	980

The majority of submissions did not contain comments regarding the Wellington Regional Strategy, but simply indicated support or opposition to the Strategy's continuation by ticking a YES/NO box. A significant proportion of comments queried the costs involved in maintaining the Committee and implementing the Strategy.

4.2 Submission themes

4.2.1 Cost

Concern was expressed about the cost of funding the Strategy by both those who supported and opposed the continuation of the Strategy. Common themes around the cost of the activity were:

- Ratepayers should not be responsible for incurring the costs, and that businesses should be funding projects designed to make the region more economically competitive.
- There should be greater scrutiny of operational costs.
- The Strategy has not noticeably improved the performance of the economy over the last four years when compared to the rest of New Zealand.
- Suggestions were made regarding how the proposed funding for the WRS could be better spent, including water supply, pest control, holding the money in reserve for the civil defence and emergency management plan, or for upgrading public buildings to withstand earthquakes.
- Suspicion that a significant portion of the Wellington Regional Strategy funding would go towards expensive consultants and contractors.

4.2.2 Wellington Regional Strategy Committee

Overall, there appeared to be some confusion about the precise nature of the Committee's role and what they were expected to achieve. Comments about the Committee included:

- Questions as to whether the cost of maintaining the Committee could be justified. Some felt that there ought to be a reduced number of Committee meetings.
- Some criticised what they perceived as a situation in which bureaucrats are trying to 'pick winners' to create a vibrant economy. A number of submitters emphasised the need for less bureaucracy, not more.

- Some people felt that the Committee being composed of various Council members from across the region constituted “double-dipping” or a “duplication of services.”
- Some submissions stated they would like to see the Committee establish a set guidelines, which will stay in place for further years for the individual Councils to work by, instead of funding staff at Grow Wellington.
- Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce supported the WRS Committee continuing to oversee governance but saw merit in reviewing the membership and makeup of the Committee. They commented that reweighting the representation according to rating contribution as opposed to one voice-one vote may result in more buy in from large disaffected Councils.

There were several suggestions made about the composition of the Committee:

- Interested members of the public and residents associations should not be excluded.
- A research or NGO representative should be appointed.
- The Committee should exist within Greater Wellington and have elected Council representatives only. Greater Wellington could then obtain specialists for funded projects as required.

4.2.3 Grow Wellington

The following themes about Grow Wellington emerged in comments on the proposed Long Term Plan:

- An evaluation of what Grow Wellington has achieved is needed before ongoing funding commitments are made.
- Positively Wellington Tourism and the Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce supported the proposal that Grow Wellington continues as the region’s economic development agency going forward.
- Some were doubtful that the money spent by Grow Wellington constituted a good use of rate payer funds.
- Having the Wellington Regional Strategy and Grow Wellington was superfluous and that they should be merged. Some were of the opinion that Grow Wellington and the Strategy are all about Wellington city and that therefore Wellington city should pay for it and leave the rest of the region to develop and implement its own growth strategies.
- Some thought that Grow Wellington should be shrunk until such time as an economic boom re-emerges (if one does), as all business proposals need 'demand', which is suppressed during a recession and can be over-estimated.

- There was an assertion that Grow Wellington should reduce its programmes and focus on core content, rather than events aiming to get people to spend money they don't have.
- Some submissions stated a preference for either disbanding or minimising expenditure on Grow Wellington, and instead concentrating on issues of sustainability, equity and fairness.

4.2.4 Greater Wellington's role

A diversity of opinions was expressed regarding Greater Wellington's role, as follows:

- Porirua and Upper Hutt City Councils, Kapiti Coast District Council and Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce all registered their continuing support for the leadership role that Greater Wellington provides in facilitating a collaborative approach to economic development.
- Federated Farmers registered support for the continuation of the WRS in a status quo situation, though commented that they viewed the status quo governance as not very agile, but that the proposed joint committees would be even more unwieldy.
- The need for Greater Wellington to host or perform supporting functions was questioned by some, commenting that Grow Wellington as a CCO is enough.
- One opinion was that Greater Wellington's involvement in economic development strategies and initiatives should cease because the projects to date were not seen to have produced any tangible or significant economic benefit to the region.
- Some criticised the Strategy on the grounds that it is too council-area focused and not based on an amalgamated/single local authority structure. However, others held the view that Greater Wellington should cease any efforts to encourage city and district councils in the region to work together and that the WRS should be the domain of city councils, not Greater Wellington. Submitters in the latter camp felt that funding into a common pot ends up with little control and that therefore each council should organise its own funding and be accountable to its own rate payers.
- In particular, a number of submissions stated that Upper Hutt has had little benefit from the WRS in relation to cost and that economic development in each territorial authority should be left to local councils with better local knowledge.

4.2.5 Governance

- Federated Farmers registered support for the continuation of the WRS in a status quo situation, though commented that they viewed the status quo governance as not very agile, but that the proposed joint committees would be even more unwieldy.

- Some submissions expressed the view that there is a need to rationalise the number of Councils in order to cut down on the level of bureaucracy.
- Some submissions stated that they believed the WRS created governance for the sake of it.
- One view was that the Chamber of Commerce or EMA would be better placed to undertake economic development in the Wellington region and that local government should not be involved as it is a private sector responsibility.
- Another opinion was that co-ordination of the WRS could be through the Mayoral Forum and Greater Wellington Strategy, because a separate economic entity creates more expense and will duplicate work supposed to be carried out by Central Government agencies such as the Ministry of Economic Development and New Zealand Trade and Enterprise.
- It was suggested by the Tawa Community Board that the current governance arrangement could be overtaken by the possible merger of the Councils.

4.2.6 Economic growth and sustainability

- Quite a number of submissions commented that the Strategy must be based on the principles of sustainable development. There were concerns that the Strategy is having too little effect on creating the kinds of work/growth opportunities that are accessible to all communities in a sustainable way. An example cited by several submitters was that the commitment to “good urban form” was contradicted by Greater Wellington’s support of Upper Hutt’s urban sprawl proposal in Maymorn.
- There was quite a lot of concern about the new, much narrower focus on the purely economic elements of the Strategy. It was acknowledged that, while a tighter focus may well be advisable, a singular focus on economic growth to the exclusion of other areas such as open spaces, biodiversity, and other important focus areas was not desirable. The fundamental importance of healthy ecosystems in enabling economic activity was highlighted.
- A number of submissions noted that attention should be given to the interconnectedness of economic development, urban development, transport and environmental quality. Retaining a focus on good regional form, including urban design, was strongly advocated.
- Several submissions emphasised that we should aim to be more economically co-operative and more economically sustainable rather than economically “competitive”, which was seen as too narrow. A broader, more long-term vision was advocated and it was suggested that Wellington should aspire to lead the way in developing and funding sustainable solutions in transport, land use, asset management, and resource management, as this would attract new residents and businesses for the long-term.
- Mt Victoria Residents’ Association stated their disappointment that the WRS’s sole aim is to make the region more economically competitive.

They would prefer the WRS be more people-focussed, with less bureaucracy, or to see it scrapped in favour of improving the regional parks and making the region more friendly and encouraging, and safer, for pedestrians and cyclists.

- Similarly, it was suggested that regional leadership must ensure that all CBDs across the region have a clear public and active transport focus, and such things as tourist public transport passes to support visitor use of attractions across the region and stencilled walking routes through the Wellington CBD to main destinations were endorsed.
- There were others who felt that the idea of a 'sustainable growth' strategy is a contradiction in terms.
- In contrast with the above comments, Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce were pleased that the WRS is being revised to focus more closely on the region's economic growth and supported the proposed six new focus areas. However, the Chamber noted that it would be concerned if there is any duplication between the WRS and Wellington City Council's Economic Development Strategy, given the contribution that Wellington business rate-payers are making to these two agencies.
- Masterton District Council registered full support for the recent re-focus from export to job growth and asked that this be included in the Strategy.
- Sustainable Wairarapa wished to add to the proposed WRS the development of an energy strategy with the objective of making use of the Region's renewable energy resources in order to strengthen the Region's energy security and underpin sustainable development. They also proposed to add an assessment of the Region's best soils and their potential use, plus an assessment of infrastructure requirements to meet any potential resulting shift from this use.
- Fonterra registered an interest in being involved in any preliminary discussions regarding amendments to the Strategy or proposed new planning documents of similar scope.

4.2.7 Measuring value

There appeared to be a lack of understanding regarding who benefits from investment in the Strategy, and comments were made that it is hard to ascertain value generated from funds spent. It was felt that if value for money was being achieved then continued calls for regional amalgamation would have ceased.

Some submissions noted that it was difficult to comment on the Strategy as it was not clear what had been achieved since 2007 under the current Strategy. It was commented that some Strategy work is required, but tangible investment in infrastructure and services needs more attention. Some submissions said that the proposal looks great in theory but that it was unclear how the tangible outcomes would be measured. A number of submissions stated that the amount to be spent on the WRS appeared high without further information about the anticipated outcomes. Some form of cost/benefit study was proposed in order to ensure good value for money is achieved.

4.2.8 Clarity of proposal

Several submitters commented that they felt the proposal to continue the WRS was broad and ill-defined. People felt the objectives were vague and that they were unclear as to exactly what the Strategy aims to do. A common complaint was that the information given regarding the WRS was not specific, and thus it was difficult to have an opinion.

Concern about 'duplication' in the economic development arena was a common theme. For example, the question arose as to whether the WRS duplicates existing channels in Central Government. Wellington Employers' Chamber of Commerce noted their concern about the potential for unnecessary duplication of regional economic development activities in light of Wellington City Council's concurrent Economic Development Strategy.

5. Comment

Officers have read and considered the submissions on the Wellington Regional Strategy Proposal, and do not recommend any changes to the proposal. Many of the comments made by submitters, particularly the comments in relation to sustainable economic growth and sustainability will be picked up through the refresh of the Wellington Regional Strategy and its implementation.

6. Recommendations

That the Wellington Regional Strategy Committee:

1. *Receives the report.*
2. *Notes the content of the report.*

Report prepared by:

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Attachment 1: Proposal to continue the Wellington Regional Strategy activity