

SUBMISSION FROM: Auckland City Centre Residents' Group (CCRG)
SUBMISSION ON: Auckland Councils' Long Term Plan Recovery Budget
DATE: 10 March 2021

CCRG welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on council's LTP Recovery Budget. We note the need to balance Investment demands with investment capacity but would suggest that the capacity to meet demand and increase capacity is more flexible than indicated.

Our overall request is that council be bold with its revenue generating and therefore budget expectations.

Auckland needs to invest now to ensure a future for coming generations. This depends on us being bold today. That means generating enough operational revenue to ensure developments and services are fit for purpose over the long term. Which also means Aucklanders need to pay now, for the future we want.

Key Issues

For this LTP we are heavily focussed on **climate/environmental issues**. Facing a climate emergency, if we don't get on top of this there won't be a liveable Tāmaki Makaurau let alone City Centre. And city centre residents are majorly impacted by various current and potential environmental issues.

The council's draft 10-year budget proposes a \$150 million bundle of climate action over a decade. We view this as unambitious and unlikely to meet the proposed targets especially as it is highly likely that current projections on climate will prove to be very optimistic.

With the effects of the current proposals over a decade likely to be way below the 50 per cent cuts in emissions needed, we need faster and more investment in climate strategies and implementations. The alternative climate investment plan of \$320 million should be the starting point.

A key CCRG view is that the reduction of health & climate damaging transport emissions needs to be Auckland's primary focus for expenditure/investment. The stats around the contribution transport makes to emissions are well-known. The effect of these emissions on illness, chronic conditions and premature death are well-established.

Nothing matters more than people's health & wellbeing. That requires a total rethink of how we plan cities.

CCRG would like Auckland Council and its CCOs to ensure that Placemaking has precedence of Movement i.e. we plan the city we want first, and we build infrastructure to support those plans. Unless we provide for this Placemaking hierarchy, we will continue to build more roads, more vehicles will use them, the roads will fill up producing demand for more roads. The more parking we provide, the more cars use the streets to get to those car parks, which then leads to demands for more parking (and more roads). Without interventions, this is the utterly predictable and proven outcome.

Worse is that the return on investment of public funds spent on road/street assets, specifically for Movement, is immediately reduced when we facilitate 24/7 parking. This approach to asset development/management defies both logic and fiscal responsibility- and we are talking about billions and billions of dollars.

It is an unsustainable and environmentally destructive process and the city centre is like the canary in the mine. The question has to be asked as to why transport is the only major infrastructure activity

that does not self-fund for private use? Most water/wastewater, electricity, telecommunications, television, media meet their own costs.

CCRG support taxes and rates paying for public assets related to transport, health, education, national security and social services. But we see no reason why public funds should be subsidising private use of public assets as is the case with a high proportion of transport costs.

On this basis, Auckland Transport should be generating another \$500m of their own income requirements via parking permits and parking fees for private vehicles. With \$1.5m registered vehicles in Auckland this averages out at less than \$6.50 per week.

That would pay for the 75% of the shortfall indicated in the proposed budget without even having to increase rates. Critically it would allow investment in the walking and other active mode programmes to continue as planned and actually be increased.

Specifically for the City Centre, CCRG request that Council designate Waihorotiu/Queen Street Valley a Zero Emissions Area for buses from 1 July 2021, and for all other vehicles within two years. This can be achieved with a simple amendment to the SOI between AT and Auckland Transport requiring AT to act consistently with various specified plans and strategies of Council (s92 LG (Auckland Council) Act 2009).

This is an essential step to protect the health and wellbeing of city centre residents, workers and visitors. Our position is supported with evidence from the January 2020 RIMU report – see the link below.

A Major concern for city centre residents is air quality (specifically very poor and worsening air quality) –
Various studies e.g. January 2020 RIMU report <https://bit.ly/2OxiGOI> report on the situation:

*In most Auckland locations, PM10 and PM2.5 had significant decreasing trends for both short- and long-term timeframes. **Queen Street is not following this trend.** This city centre site has shown significant increases in PM2.5 and PM10 for the short-term analysis.*

Nitrogen dioxide (NO2)... Queen Street has shown a statistically significant increase in NO2 since 2013 and has, for the past two years (i.e. 2019/2020), exceeded Councils ambient air quality target.

Worse is that Auckland Transport propose to increase the number of diesel buses along Queen Street once the Victoria/Albert intersection closes in June of this year. CCRG believe that Auckland Transport, as a CCO have the same obligation to comply with council's various climate change commitments and should be required to do so. No CCO should be allowed to demonstrably endanger public health.

Diesel Buses **crossing** the valley along Wellesley and Customs Street are proposed to increase, even after CRL is completed – possibly to 150-200+ at peak hours for each of those streets.

We accept that the CRL construction is a very disruptive project, but AT has the competence to develop alternatives to diesel buses along Queen Street right now, and we see no reason why electric vehicles only couldn't be used for Queen Street within a very short period of time.

The CCMP specifically provides for this -

A vibrant pedestrian priority shopping street at the heart of Waihorotiu / Queen Street Valley - Queen Street will support centre-running transit (starting with buses) and become the centrepiece of a greatly expanded pedestrian priority and low emissions zone:

For this to work now, AT needs to develop alternate means for east/west buses to turn around in or, just outside the city centre, a process that expert transport planners should have no problem developing. This single initiative will change the lives of everyone in the city centre, for whatever purpose they are there.

Issue 1: Proposed Investment Package

Transport:

CCRG support Council's efforts to maintain economic activity by being bold with its investment package. As indicated earlier, we believe AT has the capacity to substantially increase its revenue base from parking charges. \$5b over ten years is a reasonable expectation, but we suggest an independent review of that capacity and plan.

Water supply, Wastewater and Stormwater:

Clean water is essential to life. Most New Zealanders now realise we have been very cavalier with our assumptions around availability and access to clean water. Watercare are proposing ongoing annual increases over ten years. CCRG support this approach to encourage much greater economy in water use and to ensure that water assets are maintained and developed to a high standard now and in future. To that end, we would suggest that Council also work with Watercare to encourage the use of low flow taps that dramatically reduce the amount of water people use, and at a relatively small cost.

CCRG are very supportive of initiatives such as the Central Interceptor project as a means of ensuring our harbours and waterways are safe to swim in.

We would expect that Ports of Auckland Ltd., would be capable of funding their Outfall upgrade.

City Centre and Local Development:

CCRG is totally supportive of, and committed to, the City Centre Masterplan, its eight Transformational Moves, and ten strategic outcomes, of which we have to mention –

Outcome 6: Residential city centre neighbourhoods

Auckland's city centre is an increasingly popular place to live. As the city centre population grows and matures, this outcome shapes the city centre's public realm, housing supply and social infrastructure to deliver a highly liveable city centre.

All proposed projects in the city centre must reference the CCMP.

CCRG are very supportive of the various CCTR projects and the need to proceed with the Te Hā Noa/ Victoria Street Linear Park. We do however, have concerns as to how, and on what, the CCTR is sometimes being used and will be requesting a formal audit of that account in the near future.

Environmental Management and Regulation:

CCRG support the additional \$10m of funding for this essential activity. We cannot delay recycling works that are critical to cleaning up our harbours and waterways.

We support recycling opportunities but note no recycling centre is proposed for the city centre which would be an ideal location given the very high density in a small catchment. Most residents in the city centre do not own private vehicles so the car-centric ones being proposed are not of much use.

Economic and Cultural Development:

CCRG support the proposal to fund an additional \$50m for this activity. The Art Gallery is a key national institutional and should receive funding support from central government for the essential building work that is now required. Te Papa in Wellington received \$42m operating grant from central government so a small one off share of the costs associated with repairs to the heritage Auckland Art Gallery is demonstrably reasonable.

Council Support

CCRG would like to see an independent analysis of council's current operating mode and costs before endorsing any increase in funding. Experience now with Covid 19 and working from home, flexible hours and maintaining productivity, suggests that an external review of how council functions is needed.

Until then, CCRG would support the current level of funding for this activity.

We know that what is called 'asset realisation' or 'asset recycling' is another description of selling off assets to pay the bills. We don't agree with the current process which is more like a fire sale and selling assets denies future generations the use of those assets.

What we need is a careful, publicly agreed programme so that future generations have the same options we have now.

Key Issue 2: Responding to Climate Change.

As mentioned CCRG would support Alternative One – a larger investment package.

The environment is the most important aspect of life on earth. There is only one earth and we are the only ones who can look after it so let's put as much funding as we possibly can into working faster and harder on reducing the harm our previous and ongoing activities have done.

We must have a different approach for transport in Auckland which is one of the prime causes of our climate and health degradation. Apart from AT being required to raise more of their own income, we would like to see much more urgent work done on reducing the need for everyone to drive a private vehicle.

While CCRG inevitably focusses on the serious health and climate effects of traffic congestion in the city centre, the resolution to that problem resides in the suburbs and boundaries of the Auckland region.

Along with using the walkable and cycle-able catchment metrics embodied in the NPS-UD, we support an expanded and electric bus network working on a regular, high frequency and reliable time table in all suburban areas and bringing people into hubs, their town centres, plus larger hubs located in the main metropolitan centres. From here, regular and larger electric trains and/or electric buses would transport people on 24/7 designated bus lanes.

A regional system like this provides for far more environmentally friendly transport, frees up and more efficiently reallocates street space for dedicated bus lanes, safe walking and cycling and allows space for essential traffic such as service, delivery and emergency vehicles.

Trees – 11,000 is not nearly ambitious enough. CCRG would support the proposal to plant 29,000+ street trees including in our city centre. We note the tree planting opportunities completely exclude the city centre where the asphalt, high rises, lack of parks, high heat sink effect and poor air quality mean that many more trees are very urgently needed. Our cities can and should be places where nature flourishes. To that end we would be interested to see council's landscape architects playing a much larger role in the Placemaking work that council does.

Key Issue 3 – Responding to Housing and Growth.

Our first comment is that we would like this heading to be changed to “Leading Housing and Growth”. That sends to all of us a key message from council that they are determined to ensure that Aucklanders have adequate housing for those who choice to live here.

Density across all of Auckland should be greatly encouraged, especially along established and new transport routes and around village and transport nodes, supported by increased investment in safe walking and cycling. Density brings well-established benefits - the infrastructure and environmental costs of sprawl are well-documented.

CCRG does not support endless urban sprawl and believe that the environmental costs of these types of developments are no longer tolerable let alone sustainable. To that extent we are supportive of councils **Alternative One** proposals. Our preference however, is to see more flexibility in terms of housing developments and if this includes some incentives we would not be uncomfortable with that approach.

We are aware that there are a large number of vacant commercial premises in the city centre and we support conversions, whether they be for residential only, or for mixed use.

Key Issue 4 – Investment in Our Community:

CCRG are supportive of the proposals to create community facilities that are more flexible and fit for purpose than many of the existing ones. This will require leadership from the relevant local Boards with local targeted rates being considered for specific agreed community facilities.

Key Issue 5; Protecting and Enhancing our Environment:

CCRG are supportive of both the increase and extension of the Water Quality Targeted Rate as an essential element of ensuring environmental damage from past activities is remediated.

What’s Happening in Your Area: Waitematā Local Board

CCRG are very supportive of the Waitematā Local Board proposals and direction, and specifically the Urban Ngahere and walking/cycling initiatives. We want to see a big focus on mitigating and remediating the poisonous environment city centre residents live in due to diesel vehicles, especially buses and ships.

The other key area of investment we support is the provision of basic amenities, such as drinking fountains, showers, toilets and lockers. Of particular concern is to ensure that lockers are provided in the three new CRL stations across the city centre, as is the case in all other major cities across the globe. These need to be a major focus for the entire council family and not just the Waitematā Local Board.

We are very supportive of a regenerative urban farm, possibly at Bowen Street, providing city centre residents with composting, recycling, and urban farming opportunities and also opportunities for community resilience and neighbourhood-building

Your Rates for 2021/2022 and Proposed Changes to Rating Policies:

CCRG are of the view that council needs to be bolder with its rate increases. This means a slower return to 3.5% than is indicated in this section. If Auckland needs everyone to share the burden of Covid losses, then a 5% increase for the next three years, followed by 4.5% and then back to 3.5% is

better than endlessly cutting service levels across the council region and not prioritising climate emergency initiatives.

City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR)

We support the extension of the CCTR beyond 2025. We also support an increase in the amount CCTR levied on residents, which is currently a very low \$62.40 per annum. We recognise that residents have a larger part to play, and pay in creating the best city centre for those who live here.

CCRG is not yet prepared to support any of the suggestions for expenditure of the CCTR as these priorities have not yet been discussed by the City Centre Advisory Board- ACCAB. We are opposed to CCTR funds being spent on areas outside of the city centre – (pp 523/524 Supporting Information).

- City to the Villages - better connections between the city centre and city fringe to provide safe, accessible and enjoyable journeys and to from the city centre

We do support additional funding from CCTR beyond 2025 that will focus on the following CCMP priorities:

- Waihorotiu Queen Street Valley and Rapid Transport Oriented Development (e.g. development around the Aotea and Karangahape City Rail Link stations) – This will allow for growth around the City Rail Link stations and create streetscapes that are pedestrian-priority, improve public spaces and provide safe access around the stations. This will reinforce Queen Street Valley as Auckland's cultural, commercial and retail heart.
- Green Links – investing in ways to connect our green open spaces and respond to climate change. We will increase planting and canopy cover in the city centre and support sustainable development

Other Matters for Feedback

Proposals Related to Strategic Assets.

We understand the need for leasing of properties, but suggest that any long-term leases have short term reviews to deal with changing circumstances.

We are specifically concerned to make sure that Waterfront developments are not hindered by long term leases that have conditions that conflict with the types of development we want to see on our waterfront, in particular the Headland Park on Wynyard Point that we are working with Panuku to achieve.

CCRG thanks Auckland Council for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion and look forward to achieving some of the key outcomes identified in the LTP.

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