THE POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES IN AUCKLAND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

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Abstract: Political institutions, their vision and policies have influenced public transport patronage in Auckland during the last one hundred years. Recently, local politicians have adopted the vision of making Auckland the world’s most liveable city by 2040. A liveable city is one where people have easy mobility – by foot, by bicycle, by good quality public transportation, and even by a family or shared car. However, this is not currently the case in Auckland, where people do not have a real choice other than to use the private car. The purpose of this paper is to consider public transport planning and policy in Auckland and to analyse the political-institutional influence and challenges the city has faced since 2000. The paper reviews publicly available documents to explore the political and institutional relationships between local government in Auckland and central government in Wellington. The analysis shows that commonalities exist between the views of central government and Auckland transport agencies on the national economic importance of Auckland’s roading network. However, significant differences are exposed when local transport agencies advocate rail and public transport to achieve people-centred, equitable and sustainable transport solutions for a liveable city. The research concludes that the central government’s power over transport policies and land transport funding influences the outcome of public transport projects in Auckland and therefore, Auckland Council should advocate for greater control of funds at the regional level.

1. INTRODUCTION – The political-institutional nature of transport planning

Urban planning decides ‘who gets what, when, where, why and how?’ and therefore, includes a political-institutional dimensions (Forester 1982; Sandercock, 2004). These dimensions are characterised by unequal power relations between different actors (such as tiers of government, private sector and community groups), and procedures that favour some actors over others. Central governments formulate transport legislation and policies and therefore, set priorities and funding mechanisms (Banister, 2005; Curtis & Low, 2012), thereby setting ‘the parameters within which local authorities operate’ (Laffin, 2009, p. 25). Hierarchies generate necessarily collaborative relationships between central and local governments (McGarvey, 2012) with local government following central government policy directions to receive funding for over US$1 billion mega development projects (Lee & Rivasplata, 2001). Planning practice works through a national framework that is implemented by regional or local government (Friedmann, 1993; Laffin, 2009) and planners are facilitating government policy and making these policies acceptable for the public by community engagements (Sandercock, 2005; Gunder, 2010). As a result, urban planning cannot act outside the scope of politics and institutional context, and planners should embrace the political context nature of planning as ‘there is no way to avoid being political’, and openly invite political and institutional values to be examined and debated (Sandercock, 2004, p.136).

It follows that transport planning, as a subset of urban planning is also very political cum institutional (Curtis, 2005; Loh & Sami, 2013) with both central and local government exerting power over agenda setting and funding. The political-institutional direction of transport planning and policies controls whether the focus of a city transport system will be automobile dependent or transit oriented (Banister, 2002; Vuchic, 1999). Historically, the positive central-local relation is being observed in road building (Merrill, 2012). For example, in Australia and the US road building is mostly federally funded whereas public transport is rarely funded this way (Curtis, 2005). The 1956 USA Federal Aid Highway Act and Highway Revenue Act provided policies and funding to build the Interstate Highway network (Headicar, 2009; Vigar, 2001). Federal government provided 90 percent of funds, the remaining funds coming from state governments. Positive relationships ensued between central and state governments, generating cost-effective solutions; many cities demanding more extensive interstate networks. In the UK, the 1949 Special Roads Act allowed motorway building which peaked in 1972 at 400 miles (643 kilometres) per year (Headicar, 2009).
The Commonwealth government in Australia funded interstate highways in collaboration with State governments (Curtis, 2005).

After World War II, transport policies in these countries favoured cars and motorway development, justifying investment on the basis of economic growth and societal freedom (Banister, 2002). These policies have resulted in a bias toward mobility, rather than accessibility for all members of society (ibid). Car manufacturing industries, oil and road construction companies have lobbied central government to influence agenda setting and decision making processes to favour ongoing road building and car priority over other modes of transport (Freund & Martin, 1997; Gunder, 2002). Vasconcellos (1997) argues that economic prosperity, automobile subsidies, urban resource policies and public transport policies have all acted together to make transit impractical, whilst making the automobile ‘highly demanded’.

Policy and funding mechanisms have caused tensions between central and local governments. Local governments set land-use planning and transport policies, but funding remains controlled by central government (McGarvey, 2012). Local governments have to raise their own funds for projects not supported by central government (ibid). Transport is important for local government because it provides local mobility solutions which may not align with central government solutions and policies. For example, Curtis (2005) argues that Australian federal government adopted a ‘windscreen approach’ to transport infrastructure provision, giving priority to cars, with other modes being afterthoughts. In contrast, Perth favours investment in walking, cycling and public transport. As a result, solutions delivered by one tier do not satisfy the expectations of the other (Curtis & Low, 2012). Similarly, Banister (2005) notes that Edinburgh, Scotland is unable to achieve suitable transport solutions due in part to funding constraints from central government. Therefore, the positive central-local relations have been generally absent in public transport investment. However, there are few examples of positive central-local relations in public transport such as the funding for the London Underground (Merrill, 2012), and in the US Urban Mass Transportation Act 1964 (Smerk, 1965).

In recent years, central governments in these countries have become aware of the unsustainable nature of transportation networks and have formulated in the UK the Traffic Management Act 2004 and the Planning Policy Guidelines 7 (PPG), in Australia the Australian National Charter of Integrated Land Use and Transport Planning 2003 (Curtis, 2005) and in the US the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act 2005 (Roschlau, 2008), showing a significant move towards transit investment and land use and transport integration. This change toward a multi-modal approach has also come about due to recognition by central governments that cities are economically, socially and environmentally important at a national level (Hull, 2008) and politically influential (Roschlau, 2008).

After the WWII, New Zealand urban transport planning policies have followed the most extreme pro-car American models due to central government starting to fund motorways in 1953, resulting in a population that is heavily dependent on private vehicles for mobility (Mees, 2010). New Zealand has a devolved planning system with power somewhat delegated to the local level to increase the sense of ownership among local communities (Loh & Sami, 2013). Whilst the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) at the central government level is responsible for the State Highway (SH) network, including SHs passing through major cities, local authorities must provide and maintain regional transport networks, which account for 88 percent of the road network (NZTA, 2013), as well as public transport, and walking and cycling facilities. Conflict can arise between these levels due to differing priorities, affecting funding for different transport modes. The current (National party) government has a major focus on the provision of enabling infrastructure that they have named Roads of National Significance (RoNS). Three of these routes are in Auckland, whilst Auckland local government (Auckland Council and its subsidiary Auckland Transport) is trying to focus on improving the city’s public transport network, especially by building the Central Rail Link (CRL). Funding to CRL is increasingly a source of tension between central and local government.

This paper assesses the political-institutional factors that have influenced transport policies and strategies in Auckland between 2000 and 2013. The direction and priorities of central government
and Auckland Council and its subsidiaries are explored to understand the aspirations of each and the similarities and differences between them. The following section outlines the methodology followed by a critical review of the central and local government transport planning and policy documents. The final section identifies commonalities and differences on central-local transport planning relationships in Auckland, and discusses the political-institutional factors that contribute to current transport policies.

2. METHODOLOGY

Auckland, home to 1.42 million people and growing faster than the New Zealand national average (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) is our case study to explore transport priority relationships between central and local government. Central Government is responsible for the over-arching direction of transport policy for New Zealand, including the maintenance, funding and development of SHs; it is also involved in the planning and funding of rail infrastructure. Local government strategies, policies and plans must align with those released by central government, including the New Zealand Transport Strategy (NZTS) 2002 and 2008, Land Transport Management Act 2003, Government Policy Statement (GPS) on Land Transport Funding 2008, 2009 and 2012 (2012/13 – 2021/22) and National Land Transport Programme 2009 and 2012/15. Between 1999 and 2008 New Zealand had centre-left Labour-led governments, post-2008 there have been centre-right National-led governments.

Prior to 2010, seven territorial authorities, Auckland Regional Council (ARC) and Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) were involved in transport policymaking in the Auckland region. On the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, the unitary authority, Auckland Council took over region wide governance in 2010, and Auckland Transport (AT) replaced ARTA, with responsibility for the planning, development, and management of arterial roads and all public transport infrastructure, service planning and procurement. Over time, these authorities produced the Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2005, Rail Development Plan 2006, Transport Plan 2007, Regional Arterial Road Plan 2009, Auckland Transport Plan 2009, Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010-2040, and the Auckland Plan 2012 for the region.

This research uses documentary analysis, ‘a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents’ (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). It requires that data be examined to extract meaning, whilst also gaining an empirical knowledge and understanding of the text (ibid). The procedure involves finding, selecting, appraising and synthesising data in documents through organisation of the major emergent themes. Fundamentally, document analysis can be used as a means of tracking change and development. This paper identifies specific references to central or local government transport aspirations, specific transport projects, transport modes, and funding mechanisms. The analysis aims to identify and understand central and local government perspectives on Auckland transport and considers the (in)consistencies between central and local government policies. The research design uses only documents available in the public domain; interviews were not conducted but could improve the analysis.

4. ANALYSIS / RESULTS

This section draws-out the key points from central and local government documents produced since 2000. This time frame covers rule of all major political parties – Labour, National - in collaboration with the Green and Maori Parties. 2000 as the start date is chosen because it represents the first effort made to formulate a comprehensive transport strategy at the central government level. This time frame is also greater than the ten years considered necessary to analyse policies and assess the dynamics of policy change (Sabatier 1993).
4.1 Central Government Transport Policy Documents

**New Zealand Transport Strategy 2002**

The New Zealand Transport Strategy 2002, released by a Labour-led government, was the first comprehensive document since 2000 which recognise all modes and users of transport. With a ten year time frame, it was the first transport strategy to ‘respond directly to the broader social, economic and environmental needs of the country’ (MOT, 2002, p. 2), acting as a guide for all government decision making on transport. It aligns with the sustainability focus of legislation such as the Resource Management Act 1991, focusing on sustainable transport that promotes resilience and flexibility.

Lack of national and local level investment and strategic direction to address transport demand changes is acknowledged by NZTS 2002. Sustainability is promised by improving public transport, reducing congestion, providing alternatives to private car, and providing infrastructure for walking and cycling. A new patronage funding system for public passenger transport was suggested to improve access and mobility. The strategy argues that all modes must be part of sustainable regional economic development, and that effective management of existing transport systems is equally or more important than new investment. The government purchased the Auckland regional rail network in 2002, with the 'longer term goal of reducing car travel' (p. 28).

**Land Transport Management Act 2003**

The Land Transport Management Act 2003 (LTMA) sets out requirements for the operation, development and funding of the land transport system (NZTA, 2011). Its purpose is to contribute to 'an effective, efficient and safe land transport system in the public interest' (LTMA, 2003). It covers central and local government responsibilities including the distribution of funding, and sets the basis for regional transport plans.

LTMA was passed by the Labour-led government to align transport provision across New Zealand. It has been subjected to a raft of amendments, notably by the National-led government in 2008 and 2013. A sub-section was inserted in August 2008 allowing Auckland to impose a regional fuel tax of up to 10 cents per litre for capital projects, although only 5 cents per litre of fuel could be imposed for carriageways for general traffic. It was repealed two years later by the National-led government which also inserted a sub-section requiring the NZTA, Auckland Transport, Auckland Council, and other organisations that have responsibilities in relation to the Auckland transport system to cooperate, to ensure a coordinated approach to decision making.

**New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008**

This Labour-led government’s replaced the 2002 NZTS and extended its outlook to 2040, acknowledging that ‘New Zealand’s transport system is now highly dependent on road’ (MOT, 2008b, p. 22). The focus remains on economic growth, but is extended to the importance of partnership between central and local government, allowing for the consideration of local government views on funding issues. The vision ‘people and freight in New Zealand have access to an affordable, integrated, safe, responsive and sustainable transport system’ is unchanged from 2002. Specific 2040 objectives include increasing public transport nationwide from 111 million boardings in 2006/7 to more than 525 million boardings; increasing walking, cycling and other active modes to 30 percent of total trips in urban area; and halving per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from domestic transport as transport contributes around one fifth of New Zealand’s total emissions.

Congestion issues are to be addressed by providing better public transport systems, and encouraging walking and cycling. Reducing congestion is seen as integral to Auckland’s and the nation’s success as developing Auckland into a ‘world-class city’ is a ‘major component of the government’s plan for economic transformation’ (p. 57). Previous investment in the strategic highway network to alleviate congestion is seen to be unlikely to solve the problem. This strategy
determines that a public transport focus would help alleviate congestion in Auckland; thus, central and local government have invested ‘hundreds of millions of dollars in a substantial upgrade of the metropolitan rail network and the Northern Busway’ (ibid). It is estimated that approximately 5.7 million passengers travelled on the city’s rail network in 2007; an increase from 2.3 million in 2000.

Government Policy Statement on Land Transport Funding

The first Government Policy Statement (GPS) on Land Transport Funding was released by the Labour-led government in 2008. When the National government came into power in 2009, they significantly amended the GPS for 2009 and again in 2012, although there is little difference between these two documents.


This GPS aimed to reduce travel by Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOVs), while increasing public and active transport. It stresses future-focused investment, whilst ensuring that ‘people and freight have access to a more affordable, integrated, safe, responsive and sustainable transport system’ (MOT, 2008a, p. 2). GPS 2008 focuses on; halving Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) per capita from domestic transport by 2040, relative to 2007; reducing kilometres travelled by SOVs in major urban areas on weekdays by 10 percent by 2015; and increasing public transport patronage by 3 percent per year until 2015, and increasing trips from 111million in 2006/7 to 524million in 2040 (ibid). This GPS allocated over three years; $1.83billion to new and improved SH infrastructure; $670million to public transport services; $400million to public transport infrastructure; and $70million to walking and cycling facilities, a substantial increase in sustainable transport modes.


The 2009 GPS amendment reflects the National-led government’s priorities for land transport of economic productivity and growth, with ‘investment in the SH network as a key to the efficient movement of freight and people’ (MOT, 2009, p. 11). The road building focus is justified by journey to work 2006 census data which shows that 84 percent of people getting to work by car. Government supports some modal shift but considers that this ‘should not be accelerated to the point where the outcomes are economically inefficient’ (p. 1). This GPS supports economic growth by maintaining investment in new and improved SH infrastructure at 33-34 percent of the total fund (approximately $10.7b over ten years). The government lists the Roads of National Significance (RoNS) as ‘New Zealand’s most essential routes that require significant development to reduce congestion, improve safety and support economic growth’ (p. 10). Three out of seven RoNS are within the Auckland region (see Figure 1).

This GPS allocates over three years $3billion to new and Improved infrastructure for SHs; $635million to public transport services; $135million to public transport infrastructure; and $50million to walking and cycling facilities.

Figure 1 RoNS in the Auckland Region
Source: NZTA

The 2012 GPS supersedes the previous GPS and its amendments. It ‘reinforces the focus on increasing economic growth and productivity as the primary objective for land transport expenditure’ and ‘places particular importance on investment in the SH network including RoNS’ (MOT, 2012a, p. 8). The increased SH funding is believed to benefit national economic growth and productivity. The government still sees the need for public transport to reduce congestion in metropolitan cities, and will invest up to $690million from 2012-2015, a slight increase on the previous GPS. As with the 2009 GPS, more than $2billion of funding is for improvements to metro rail in Auckland and Wellington. The differences in funding between the GPS 2008, 2009 and 2012 are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: GPS allocations on transport (Source: MOT, 2012a)

Note: Adapted from GPS 2009 and amendments and GPS 2012. ‘SH’ expenditure includes ‘New and Improved infrastructure for SHs’, ‘Renewal of SHs’, and ‘Maintenance and Operation of SHs’; ‘Public Transport’ expenditure includes ‘Public Transport Services’ and ‘Public Transport Infrastructure’; ‘Local Roads’ expenditure includes ‘New and improved infrastructure for local roads’, ‘Renewal of local roads’, and ‘Maintenance and operation of local roads’, as per the Activity Classes set out in each GPS.: The 2012 GPS Expenditure is taken from averages, whereas the previous three are figures directly from the GPS.

National Land Transport Programme (NLTP)

i) NLTP 2009-2012

Giving effect to the GPS, the Auckland specific chapter of this document specifies the funding distribution and prioritises projects that contribute directly to economic development, improved productivity and safety. The NLTP recognises the need to reduce congestion and make the city more competitive by providing increased funding for investing in key arterial routes, the RoNS and urban public transport routes (NZTA, 2009). For local roads, the government funds capacity improvements on high volume roads before considering expenditure on new infrastructure. It states that public transport is critical to reducing congestion and contributes to economic growth.

Auckland receives a large proportion of the 30 percent increase in nationwide funding for public transport services, and a 30 percent increase in funding for high priority SH projects (compared to the 2006-9 period). The majority of public transport investment was to be in rail capital and supporting operational funding over a three year period, including a loan to the region to purchase rail rolling stock.

ii) NLTP 2012-15

This NLTP particularly focuses on Auckland where there are significant transport opportunities to support that city’s contribution to the country’s economic growth (NZTA, 2012). The programme provides new and improved infrastructure in areas of intense growth pressure, particularly in
The political-institutional challenges in Auckland public transport

Auckland which still has the most severe congestion in the country. Key areas for investment include the Waterview Tunnel as part of the Auckland Western Ring Route (motorway project) and the Auckland Manukau Eastern Transport Initiative (AMETI). AMETI is a long term, $1.5 billion strategy designed to ease traffic congestion, provide much improved passenger transport links and contribute to economic growth and activity in South East Auckland. Around $890 million will be spent on public transport, including loan repayments on 57 electric trains, rail improvements, and integrated ticketing across all public transport modes ($2.9m earmarked in 2012-13 for this project).

4.2 Local Government Transport Policy Documents

**Auckland Regional Land Strategy 2005**

Auckland Regional Council (ARC) prepared the Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) in 2005. RLTS states that ‘for the foreseeable future the majority of trips will continue to be made by car’, due to the low density development, making the high use of private vehicles ‘inevitable … [as] ‘cars give most Aucklanders a wide choice of living and work locations’ (ARC, 2005, p. 6). Under the RLTS, ARC aimed to spend 62 percent of their budget on roading to complete the regions strategic network, 34 percent on public transport and 4 percent on travel demand. A ‘High Passenger Transport’ option is seen as the best investment for transport over the next 10 years with the main focus being to ‘Make best use of the existing transport system’ (p. 5), as opposed to investment in future projects. ARC believed this to be a significant funding mismatch, and the reason why recommended investment in public transport had not being achieved. The funding policies of central government place greater emphasis on SH projects than on regional passenger transport or local roading projects.

ARC argued the public transport system should have a high degree of coordination. The introduction of integrated ticketing and fares between different modes will ‘assist in ensuring the network is efficient and affordable for users’ (p. 8). However, the strategy specifies that rail will never be a main component of the transport network, though it has the capacity to service critically congested locations.

**Rail Development Plan 2006**

The Rail Development Plan aims to encourage economic growth in Auckland’s CBD and other major centres. This is a change from the 2005 RLTS as rail is now seen as ‘extremely efficient at moving people’ and is the ‘essential back bone of the Rapid Transit Network’ (ARTA, 2006, p. 6). Private vehicles are seen as contributing to Auckland’s $1 billion/year congestion problem, and although government is making huge investments in roads, ‘this alone will not provide long-term sustainable solutions to Auckland’s congestion’ (p. 28). Rail corridors are significantly underutilised, while heavy investment in motorway corridors is expensive, politically difficult and disrupts local communities. ARTA aimed to have 30 million trips per annum by rail in 2030 and concludes that electrifying the rail network and purchasing electrical multiple unit trains (EMUs) is the right long term decision for Auckland.

**Auckland Transport Plan 2007**

The RLTS 2005 and the Auckland Transport Plan 2007 prioritise making ‘the best use of the existing transport system’ (ARTA, 2007, p. 37), although ARTA only saw the plan as a step in the right direction. A key issue for the region was ‘finding ways to respond to the growing demand for vehicle travel in ways that are sustainable, safe and cost effective’ (p. 8). The identified projects and programmes require funding of almost $17 billion over a ten year period, comprising roading (63 percent), passenger transport (31 percent) and travel demand management (6 percent). This plan expected to utilise the regional fuel tax for Auckland initiated under the LTMA but subsequently repealed, to help fund integral projects such as rail electrification.
Auckland Transport Plan 2009

This 2009 plan replaced the 2007 version, attempting to take a longer term view to ‘ensure the region can deliver the transport system envisaged’ (ARTA, 2009a, p. 4). The plan states that the ability of Auckland’s transport system to meet the growth in travel demand will depend on future investment in the rail and bus network. This plan requires funding of almost $15billion, though this amount does not include the full construction of the Waterview connection, CBD Rail Tunnel, rail to the airport, or an additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing. Collectively, these additional costs could increase funding requirements to $22billion. Despite significant central government funding in the region in previous years, funding gaps still exist; projects of regional importance are often delayed because Auckland cannot fund its 50 percent requirement.

The Auckland Transport Plan believes an efficient public transport system has positive effects on local communities, the environment and health (ARTA, 2009a). From a social perspective, ARTA wanted to ensure ‘people of all abilities have access to Auckland’s spaces and places by progressively improving access to public transport stops and upgrading footpaths’ (p. 10). In addition, the plan aims to increase travel choices and reduce reliance on private cars. Thus, building roads is considered a short term solution, and integrating land use and transport planning ‘is vital to delivering balanced transport and land use solutions’ (p. 13). Two key projects delivered by this plan are the electrification of the Auckland Rail Network (to be completed by 2013) and the CBD Rail Tunnel, $670million to be funded by central government. Upgraded rail services had already resulted in significantly increased passenger transport patronage in the previous 12 months.

ARTA wanted regional arterial roads to receive a higher financial contribution from NZTA to ‘help redress the funding imbalance between strategic arterial roads and SHs in Auckland and to reflect the greater importance of regional arterials to economic development’ (p. 40).

Regional Arterial Road Plan 2009

Although regional arterial roads only make up 4 percent of the total length of Auckland’s road network, they are predicted to cater for 40 percent of road based passenger transport demand, but only represent 16 percent of funding (ARTA, 2009b). A guiding principle is that the arterial road network should be ‘designed to accommodate public transport and to provide priority for public transport vehicles where warranted by demand and traffic conditions’ (p. iii). ARC predicted that between 2001 and 2016 demand for private vehicles in Auckland would increase by 25 percent, indicating that radical measures are necessary. A shift in perception and ‘significant investment is required to improve the person-carrying capacity rather than the vehicle-carrying capacity of routes’ (p. 6).

Congestion is still seen as a major issue in Auckland, and improvement in bus movement over regional arterials would reduce journey times, encourage further patronage, and in turn reduce congestion. ARTA encouraged the use of bus lanes on all major public transport routes’ (p. 27). ARTA also advocated for increased funding for regional arterials to reduce the funding disparity between them and SHs due to the through function they play.

Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010-2040

The 2010 RLTS builds on the 2005 version but with a 30 year timeframe advocating higher investment in trains, buses and ferries (ARC, 2010), but with no specific funding break-down between modes. As before, the primary objectives are economic growth, access and mobility, and environmental sustainability, the latter two resulting from improved and better used public transport, but with the additional objective of supporting a compact urban form. Stress moves from SH construction to ‘a much stronger emphasis on investing in public transport improvements and on improvements to local roads, particularly improved operation of regional arterials’ (p. 67). The main components of the strategy include integrated transport ticketing and fares; electrifying the rail network and increasing frequencies by 2015; constructing the CBD rail link by 2021; completing
the Western Ring Route (roading) by 2015, constructing AMETI by 2010; widespread arterial road improvement with a focus on public transport [and the regional strategic freight network].

The RLTS implements the NZTS, and thus expects access and mobility to be improved through increased public transport use from 3.4 percent of all trip legs in 2007 to 12 percent by 2040. Modelling expects the proposed improvements to increase public transport mode share to 10.3 percent in 2040, a shortfall on the target, but still a 270 percent increase in boardings. The 2010 RLTS acknowledges the significant gap between desired outcomes and the financial ability to achieve them, particularly for public transport. This is an ongoing issue which highlights the mismatch between central, regional and local government interests. ARC believed that for strategies to be successful a ‘fundamental change in how people use the transport network and how it is funded’ (p. 49) is required. The first ten years of this RLTS, show a funding shortfall of $3billion, for rail infrastructure, public transport and local roading improvements.

Auckland Plan 2012

The Transport section of the Auckland Plan aims to increase public transport from 70million trips in 2012 to 140million trips by 2022 (AC, 2012), subject to additional funding. Indicative thirty year expenditure on transport gives 57 percent to roading; 47 percent for public transport; and 3 percent to walking, cycling and travel demand management.

The plan acknowledges the regional transport system to be ‘overburdened and inefficient’ (p. 313), due to years of underinvestment in public transport and settlement patterns, both compounded by decision-making in the previous half century. To improve congestion, accommodate future business and population growth, and complete the existing road and rail network requires; a move to a single transport system, a shift to public transport, and maximising the environmental and health benefits of walking and cycling.

The first priority of this plan is to ‘manage Auckland’s transport as a single system’ (p. 318) because an efficient multi-modal transport system is integral to achieving a well-connected and resilient transport system, which gives choices to Aucklanders. Key objectives include completing the SH network; upgrading the public transport system; the Western Ring Route Section at Waterview; and improving public transport service efficiency through initiatives such as integrated ticketing and electrifying the existing rail system. New funding mechanisms are required to help finance the approximately $10billion-$15billion funding shortfall for transport projects over the 30 year period of the Auckland Plan. This gap is most prominent in the first decade, with insufficient funds to implement projects such as the CRL, despite this being top priority and targeted for completion by 2021.

5. DISCUSSION

This section discusses the commonalities and differences between central and local government with regards to Auckland transport priorities.

Political differences and similarities

i) National politics
The Labour Government was in power between 1999 and 2008. To govern during its three terms, it negotiated a number of support agreements with minor parties: the Alliance Party (1999-2002), Progressive Party (2002-2005), and New Zealand First and United Future (2005-2008), with support from the environmentalist Green Party for all nine years. Labour’s concerns about congestion and the detrimental effects of the auto-dependent Auckland transport network are seen consistently from their first Transport Strategy 2002 onwards. Labour acknowledged in 2002 that central government public investment had previously favoured the road network, a funding system that had not addressed changes in transport demand. They saw public transport as the solution to transport problems; and by 2008, public transport investment was as high as 31 percent of the
equivalent spent on SH investment (MOT, 2008a). This shift in focus reflected temporal changes seen internationally, such as in the UK with the Traffic Management Act 2004, and the Australian National Charter of Integrated Land Use and Transport Planning 2003.

However, the election of a National-led government in late 2008 reversed progress made towards a more sustainable transport network. A road based perspective to transport problems was immediately adopted, resulting in the amendment of the then current GPS reducing public transport investment nationwide to only 17 percent of SH investment and with a focus only on public transport in the major cities. Thus, New Zealand diverged from progressive trends seen in countries (such as Australia and Canada) facing similar transport problems and instead opted for contested option that investment in roads can bring economic growth (Black, 2001). There is some evidence of public transport being regarded as a partial solution to congestion problems, but this is largely overshadowed by the heavy emphasis on investment in RoNS and the SH network. In June 2013, the Prime Minister of NZ, John Key, for the first time showed support for the proposed Auckland City Rail Link (CRL), but he has not committed central government to funding the project so far.

ii) Local politics

Structural changes within the Auckland region have resulted in major temporal changes. Inconsistency and conflict between local councils led in 2004 to the formation of ARTA (a subsidiary of the Auckland Regional Council) to coordinate regional transport planning. The Regional Land Transport Strategy was released in 2005 which lacks a collective sense of purpose and multiple parties being involved with central government in funding decisions. These issues are one of the reasons which led to the formation of Auckland Council (AC), as recommended by the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance (2009), replacing the regional council and seven local councils. ARTA was also dissolved and its duties assigned in part to Auckland Transport (AT) and Auckland Council (AC).

Awareness has increased in the region of the need for public transport. The Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2005 argues high use of private vehicles as inevitable and rail as insignificant. However, in 2006 a Rail Development Plan was released, regarding rail as the back bone of public transport and private vehicles as major contributors to congestion.

With the creation of the Auckland Council, the office of ‘Mayor of Auckland’ was created. As shown in Table 1 the issue of transport was important in the first mayoral election in 2010. Len Brown, previously mayor of Manukau City, was elected on a platform including public transport improvements (AC, 2012). Brown is particularly focused on rail transit, and strongly advocates implementation of the Auckland CRL. Brown’s re-election in 2013 shows support for his commitments to public transport and CRL.

Planning differences and similarities

The hierarchy of plans and strategies means that high level policies create a framework within which local government has to work (Headicar, 2009). New Zealand embodies this international paradigm, whereby local government is responsible for local roads, public transport, cycling and walking, and central government is responsible for funding SHs (and some walking and cycling). There are overlapping responsibilities for Auckland transport as shown in Table 2. Over the last decade, a partnership approach has been progressed for SHs and regional arterial roads (such as AMETI), in order for Auckland to achieve a world class transport system (ARC, 2010; MOT, 2009b).

Over time, there has been a shift by both levels toward acknowledging the importance of public transport. Central government sees it as a way of reducing congestion and thus freeing up road space for economic activities (such as freight to the Port of Auckland) (MOT, 2009b). Local government concurs, but also sees the community, environmental, health and accessibility benefits of efficient public transport (ARTA, 2009a).
Central and local government have a significant focus on Auckland’s economic capability. Central government focuses on Auckland’s national economic context in the NZTS 2008, GPS 2012, and NLTP 2012. The city receives a high proportion of nationally funded projects such as AMETI and the $1billion investment in rail track extensions and electrification (MOT, 2009b), as the city is a ‘major component of the government’s plan for economic transformation’ (MOT, 2008b, p. 57). This Auckland emphasis on economic development can be seen as adequate justification for the expenditure on the RoNS and SHs in the region. Auckland regional agencies partially reflect this viewpoint, with the RLTS 2010 articulating Auckland’s importance for national economic growth and productivity. The main focus however, is on regional economic productivity and maximization via improved internal linkages and reduced congestion. It is evident from both tiers of government that economic potential and gains from transport are the most important reasons for investment.

Both central and local government focus on the environmental impacts of transport, with local government emphasising air pollution, obesity, unhealthy automobile dependent lifestyles, and reduced community cohesion. The NZTS 2008 aims to incorporate the protection of public health into transport planning, by making links between physical activity and less automobile dependency. All central government documents also emphasise the importance of increasing transportation safety. Central government’s transport strategy also acknowledges the impact of transport on for instance health; energy; and disability strategies, and notes that improvements to the transport sector will result in improvements elsewhere. However, within the central government transportation documents, there is a significant emphasis on the negative economic impacts of environmental degradation. GHGs are extensively discussed; as under the Kyoto Protocol, central government is obliged to reduce GHG emissions or face economic consequences.

### Table 1 Mayoral Candidates Transport Issues in 2010 and 2013 election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top three Candidate</th>
<th>Final Vote Count</th>
<th>Transport Agenda</th>
<th>‘Top Five Issue’ Ranking for Transport</th>
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<tr>
<td>Len Brown (Elected Mayor)</td>
<td>237487</td>
<td>“Transport Transformation” - reduce congestion through a rail link to airport, CBD Rail Loop and second harbour crossing that includes rail; Electric Trains and integrated ticketing; Extending ferry network</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Banks</td>
<td>171542</td>
<td>Public transport focus on ferry connections and wharves that service Waitemata Harbour; WiFi on ferries; Inner city loop and airport link for rail and generalised improvements to rail already in region; Cycleways along key routes; Waitemata Harbour crossing that includes rail capability</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin Craig</td>
<td>42598</td>
<td>Supporting the Anzac Centenary Bridge proposal - (ten general traffic lanes (potentially two dedicated bus and/or heavy traffic lanes); two light rail tracks and purpose-built walking and cycling facilities)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Len Brown (Re-elected)</td>
<td>162675</td>
<td>Central Rail Link; Rollout new electric trains; Complete implementation of integrated ticketing system; Push for increases in public transport use</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Palino</td>
<td>107672</td>
<td>Invest wisely for an effective transport system; Reduce congestion; Encourage commuters to use public transport; Work on major transport projects; Invest in park and ride facilities; Electrification of the rail network; Proper alignment of CRL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Berry</td>
<td>13539</td>
<td>No mention</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from [http://www.vote.co.nz](http://www.vote.co.nz)

Note: Grey boxes show 2013 candidates.
The political-institutional challenges in Auckland public transport

Table 2 Auckland transport responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Central Government (Ministry of Transport / NZTA)</th>
<th>Local Government (Auckland Transport / ARTA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Highway</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arterial roads</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local roads</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail infrastructure</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail services</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus infrastructure</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus service planning</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport planning</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance, 2009. Number of ✔ shows the intensity of responsibilities.

Note: The Ministry for the Environment is interested in the pollution and environmental aspect of transport in Auckland, whilst the Ministry of Energy is focused on the energy aspect of transport. The focus of this project is on urban transport and therefore airport authorities and ports are not relevant to this research.

Whilst regional agencies see the benefits of reducing congestion as multi-faceted, central government views the problem almost solely in economic terms. Consequently their solutions are also different. Although Labour-led governments advocated public transport, slightly changed higher national investment in public transport, and it was overturned by the subsequent National-led government, which sees RoNS and SHs as the major priorities for land transport.

**Funding differences and similarities**

Responsibility for the rail network in Auckland is shared between KiwiRail (central government) which maintains and improves the rail network, while AT upgrades and manages station facilities (KiwiRail, 2013). From 2006, the Auckland region has seen the potential of rail, with emphasis on the electrification of the rail network, integrated ticketing, and construction of the CRL. RLTS 2010 states that both central and Auckland governments had spent ‘hundreds of millions’ on upgrades to the metropolitan rail network.

Funding for land transport is split between central and local government. The NZTA, a crown entity, is responsible for the SH network and controls the NLTF. In 2011/12, NLTF allocates 53 percent of the total national transport funding to SH network (MOT, 2012a). This fund is accessible by local governments to fund regional projects, but funds must be matched at least 50 percent out of local government coffers. In Auckland, SHs account for approximately 4 percent of the road network, a similar proportion to arterial roads (ARTA, 2009b). Although, SHs carry a disproportionate amount of peak hour traffic at 27 percent, arterial roads account for 44 percent of peak hour traffic (ARTA, 2009a). In addition, central government controls allocation of the NLTF; placing a cap on allocations for instance to public transport and regional arterial routes, and thereby retaining power over the direction of regional transport. The 2012 NLTP, the 2010 RLTS, and the 2012 Auckland Plan share key areas of investment, such as the Waterview Tunnel and AMETI.

New Zealand follows current trends seen in Scotland, Australia, England and the US whereby central government has tight control over finances, and local government policies require central government approval before funding is released (Banister, 2005). By controlling allocation of subsidised work through the NLTF, central government effectively decides which regional projects will proceed and the direction of national and regional transport policies. Central government sees RoNS and SHs as integral to economic development, Auckland holds a different view focussing on
regional roading and public transport, especially rail. By 2012, the CRL had become the top transport priority for Auckland local government; for central government Auckland rail as a whole is important, but without particular focus on the CRL.

The activity classes in the GPS set the fiscal limits for public transport improvements funded by NLTF. This means Auckland cannot fund its chosen projects. The Auckland Transport Plan 2009 and the Regional Arterial Road Plan 2009 seek to redress funding imbalance between strategic arterial roads and SHs to reflect the importance of arterials to the region. Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010 identifies that the availability and allocation of funds is an ongoing problem, advocating that central government should change funding allocations to better reflect local government interests.

In the Auckland Transport Plan 2007, the distribution of funding means that public transport only receives 49 percent of the equivalent amount spent on roading ($5.27billion versus $10.71billion) (ARTA, 2007). This is opposed to central government, whereby the equivalent spending on public transport to roading was at its highest at 31 percent (2008), and currently around 17 percent in 2012. The percentage Auckland wishes to spend on public transport increases in the 2009 Transport Plan, with the funding split increasing by 3 percent for public transport, with only a 1 percent increase for roading (ARTA, 2009a). Thus, it is obvious that Auckland wishes to invest proportionally more into their public transport network than central government is willing to invest nationally.

The discussion clearly shows that Auckland local government and central government have some commonalities and differences on Auckland’s transport priorities. Generally, commonalities exist in roading projects and differences appear in public transport roles and related projects.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper is to identify the influence of politics on Auckland transport priorities since 2000. This paper particularly explores the similarities and differences between central and local government on Auckland transport issues by analysing strategic documents produced by both levels of government. The analysis shows that Auckland transport decision making is complex and multi-level where central and local government have individual and overlapping responsibilities for the different facets of transport planning. Central government controls the allocation of national land transport funding which favours road development to achieve economic growth and productivity. Conversely, Auckland is unable to significantly advance public transport projects due to an absence of central government funding. Auckland's aim of becoming the most liveable city needs not only a multi-modal transport system but also innovative governance and creative funding arrangements to make this vision possible. These conflicting aspirations are also seen in the literature in the hierarchical relationship between tiers of government.

It is recommended that central government should give Auckland greater financial independence to enable implementation of the regions preferred strategic transport vision. There is a need to establish a permanent forum (an Auckland Transport Forum) where local stakeholders and residents can discuss the future direction of transport in Auckland. This would not only provide greater understanding of the needs of Aucklanders’ but would also support AC and AT in their negotiations with central government. Research should include emerging factors such as the needs of immigrants, the ageing population and the cost of oil in justifying public transport provision in Auckland. Local politics is more likely to consider the social and demographic factors, regional economic growth and employment which favour the provision of public transport.

Acknowledgement

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