

AUCKLAND NEWS

Seventy RMLA members and friends attended the first RMLA (Auckland Branch) luncheon in May. Peter Winder of the Auckland Regional Council spoke. He has worked for the ARC for nine years as a transportation planner before taking up his current position of Manager, Regional Development, nine months ago. As a transport planner, Peter has assessed the impact of second harbour crossings, light rail transit schemes, busways and a range

of major roading projects.

Peter is now responsible for the ARC's policies on metropolitan limits, urban containment and consolidation and major infrastructure.

In this abridged version of his speech to the RMLA Auckland Branch luncheon, Peter spoke about the growth pressures facing Auckland.

AUCKLAND'S GROWTH ON A RUNAWAY PATH?

We all know that the Auckland Region is home to one million people (about 28% of the Nation's population). Historically the Auckland region has attracted 60% of the Nation's growth, growing at a rate of 15,000 people per annum over the period 1986 to 1991. Natural increase accounted for about 70% of that growth. So let's put to one side the whole view that Auckland is too large already and should stop growing. Unless we send our children to live in places like Invercargill or Australia, Auckland will continue to grow.

On top of that underlying level of natural increase the Government has placed a whole new dynamic of international migration. Auckland attracts about 80% of new permanent migrants to New Zealand. Following changes to migration policy the Government has issued 90,000 permanent residence visas over the last three years. Potentially this represents 72,000 new Aucklanders, from migration alone, within a three year period.

Auckland faces population growth more like 34,000 per annum This is equivalent to the population of Dunedin arriving here in just a four year period.

increase means that Auckland faces population growth more like 34,000 per annum than the 15,000 previously experienced. This is equivalent to the population of Dunedin arriving here in just a four year period. At current densities of development that is roughly equivalent to requiring an additional 6,000 ha of residential land over the next four years. That is about the same as the whole of the existing built up area of the North Shore.

This growth clearly places great pressure on all of Auckland. Environmentally it places pressure on the qualities we enjoy and value very highly. It also casts a rather large question mark over our ability to avoid some fairly substantial impacts upon the environment. Economically, this growth has brought pressure on house prices and the building industry, but it also stimulates investment and job creation. Socially growth of this magnitude brings pressures, community resistance, racial tension and resistance to the sheer pace of change.

Administratively, this growth finds us in the throws of the wholesale revision of our statutory planning process, with new and untried legislation being implemented by local authorities who are still grappling with the territories they inherited from amalgamation.

This growth has also shown up some fairly fundamental failings in both planning and building controls and their administration. We now know, to our cost, that for much of our urban area there are few controls that actually protect amenity, privacy, and heritage.

This major growth spurt is also occurring at a time when most of Auckland's major urban infrastructure systems are at or near significant

capacity thresholds. Auckland needs an expanded and secure water supply. Our centralised sewage treatment plant is rapidly approaching capacity limits and major components of the collection system that supports it are operating well above their design capacity. Significant parts of the older combined stormwater and sewage reticulation system are old, tired and operating above capacity resulting in increasingly frequent overflows of raw sewage. Major elements of the electricity reticulation system need to be enhanced; a second runway at Auckland International Airport is planned; our key social services will need to be expanded to cater for a larger cliental; we have made little investment in new transport infrastructure since the construction of the motorway system to decline to the point where it is little more than the mode of travel of last resort providing poor mobility for a very small minority of Aucklanders.

When Auckland's growth slowed dramatically in the 1970's our urban infrastructure was relatively new and had substantial spare capacity. Since then we have lived off that fat and we got out of the habit of spending money on infrastructure. Successive local government administrations have campaigned on platforms of reducing government, regulation, and rates. Now we face the need to urgently upgrade and enlarge that infrastructure in order to cope with both a range of current problems and future growth.

A recent ARC study conservatively estimated that over the next thirty years, Auckland will have to invest in excess \$4.8 billion of public expenditure to expand our infrastructure to cope with growth. More recent work suggests that initial estimate may be a

Combining this large jump in migration with underlying natural

considerable underestimate. It now appears that over the next 20 years the cost of improvements to the Watercare Services wastewater collection and treatment system alone is likely to cost around \$1.5 billion.

Going hand in hand with this substantial population growth are some other rather alarming trends. Auckland has one of the highest levels of vehicle ownership per person in the world, and it is continuing to grow at about twice the rate of growth in population with no indication of slowing.

Aucklanders also travel more than ever before. In 1963 people in Auckland made on average 2.1 trips per day and 55% of them were by car. By 1992 Aucklanders made almost 2.7 trips per day and a staggering 72% were by car.

Recent ARC forecasts of traffic growth suggest that, without a significant intervention to bring about a change, CO₂ emissions from transport in Auckland are likely to increase by almost 50% to around 2.9 million tons per annum by the year 2021. How much forest can we plant?

The decentralisation of employment and the growth of the sub-regional centres, has contributed to increasingly complex commuting patterns, and along with peripheral growth has led to an increase in the average length of trips made by Aucklanders. Between 1981 and 1991 the average length of the journey to work increased from 10.8km to 12.6km. This 17% increase in the length of the average trip to work is equivalent to an additional 1.4 million vehicle kilometres of travel per day.

This contributes to the 1.9 million

tons of CO₂ produced each year by Auckland's transport system. To put this in context, the proposed Stratford power station would produce 1.4 million tons of CO₂ per annum. Recent ARC forecasts of traffic growth suggest that, without a significant intervention to bring about a change, CO₂ emissions from transport in Auckland are likely to increase by almost 50% to around 2.9 million tons per annum by the year 2021. How much forest can we plant?

We must also note that Auckland cannot continue to grow outward in any direction without meeting at least one major environmental constraint or comprising at least one major resource value. Whether they be water quality, significant and very vulnerable ecosystems, Maori values, significant coastal landscapes, protected natural areas, catchments prone to flooding, unstable land or prime agricultural land; no matter which way we turn, they are present.

In this context let us not overlook the importance to the region of our rural hinterland. On just 2% of the nation's land area the Auckland region not only houses one million people but is also home to 12% of NZ's horticulture, and 35,000 ha of plantation forest. Within the region the Franklin District alone produced 40% of NZ's fresh vegetables and a similar proportion of the nation's fresh milk.

The problems are not new, the question is what should be done about them. In the context of the Resource Management Act I feel that in many respects that becomes a philosophical question about the relative roles of government and the market place and that dreaded notion of intervention.

There is a strong constituency for the massive, interventionist, quick fix solution to "the problem." We must be very wary of this approach, not only does it fundamentally miss the point that there is more than one problem to address, it also completely misses the boat with respect to Auckland's ability to fund gradiose solutions. Following the Comprehensive Transportation Study Update of 1988 the then ARA adopted a policy of implementing a light rail transit system in Auckland. The estimated cost was between \$300 and \$400 million. Having watched the

search for new and innovative ways of funding such a project, without putting it all on the rates bill, I can confirm that Santa Clause does not exist. If we want something we will have to pay for it.

...we must focus on the broad big picture issues and in particular have the needs of future generations balanced alongside the desires of the current one.

On the other hand there is strong constancy for the view that the Act is only about avoiding, remedying or mitigating effects. We now talk about "effects based planning." Hand-in hand with this view tends to go a rather reductionist view of government suggesting that the role of resource managers is to clearly enunciate the values and resources that need to be protected in some way and then leave the market to it.

In the context of Auckland's growth, I feel that both of these approaches miss something quite fundamental about both the nature of our problems and our duties under the Act. The problems we face are a mix of the very immediate and the extremely long term. It is the cumulative adverse effects of our growth which make our past pattern of development unsustainable. This means that we must focus on the broad big picture issues and in particular have the needs of future generations balanced alongside the desires of the current one.

We cannot expect the market place by itself to suddenly make our future sustainable. By the same token, Government's track record in intervention is rather less than impressive. The answer is in partnership and community ownership of the problems.

We have collectively invested a huge amount in getting to where we are now and those investments in homes,

factories, offices, roads, ports, airports and infrastructure will fundamentally shape our future - whether we like it or not. The opportunity for dealing with our problems thus arises not from the wholesale re-organisation of what we have already got, but rather from the sensible management of the growth itself.

Because the "problem" is growth, the solutions lie in how growth is managed, how the impacts of growth are avoided, remedied or mitigated, and how the major resource conflicts are resolved. These factors point to the need for a development strategy, made up of a number of elements, rather than simple solution or master plan. One of the most important elements of such a strategy is to preserve for the future as much choice and flexibility as we can. It must also be focused on influencing the key investments that shape our future and the nature of region.

Put bluntly, the Regional Council's strategic response to these problems is to say that in order to safeguard the things we value, and preserve for the future some degree of choice and flexibility we should make better use of what we have already got before we consume any more.

The key elements of this strategic response are:

- the containment of urban development within defined limits and the encouragement of urban intensification at selected places within those limits;
- the development of regional infrastructure and a transport system which is consistent with and reinforces the pattern of urban intensification; and the protection both the productive capacity of rural land and soils and the region's natural resource base from the irreversible processes of degradation associated with urbanisation.

This strategic response is the basis for the ARC's Regional Policy Statement. It is also being worked through the Regional Land Transport Strategy required under the Transit New Zealand Act - and by that mechanism will have a profound impact upon the nature of investment in transport. The emerging transport strategy is based upon moving people and goods, not

vehicles and emphasises more efficient mode of travel. In the northern corridor, that involves the proposed new high occupancy vehicle lane which will provide an exclusive right of way and priority for buses and other high occupancy vehicles. In the Southern and Western corridors the strategy is emphasising the role of rail, and should be supported by re-development along the existing rail lines. In an immediate way the on-going reviews of the public transport route contracts that the ARC lets are re-orientating the public transport system away from a complete orientation on the CBD and achieving a substantial increase in both cross-town services and services based on sub-regional centres.

The strategic direction of containment and consolidation has also been strongly advocated through the plethora of studies currently underway reviewing Auckland's wastewater reticulation and treatment systems.

*Intensification through
indiscriminate infill is probably
as far from our goal as continued
peripheral growth.*

Clearly, the approach has a long way to go, and the critical elements now are how we move from the current situation toward a different future. How and where urban intensification occurs is one of the most vital questions. Intensification through indiscriminate infill is probably as far from our goal as continued peripheral growth. Urban intensification should occur in selected areas, and along selected transport corridors in a way which contributes to the efficiency of urban transport and the upgrading of utility services. It must also be balanced against all of our other responsibilities to protect the things that we value - whether they be heritage resources, landscapes, trees,

water courses or harbours.

In closing I would like to take further the relationship between the market and Government in the infill housing issue. I want to stress that as far as I can see the current wave of infill housing has very little to do with the policy of containment, or the metropolitan limits - there is substantial land available for development within the proposed metropolitan limits. In part, what we are seeing is a shift in market preference that is a recognition of the very problems of urban sprawl and inefficiency that we see as the rationale for a policy of intensification. It also reflects a very different wave of migrants to Auckland who have different tastes, expectations and lifestyles from the conventional NZ family. Infill development has taken advantage of planning provisions that have been in existence for a very long time and has highlighted for me the rigidity and inflexibility of our planning process. The checks, balances and litigation involved in our planning and regulatory process make it extremely difficult to respond to problems in a timely fashion.

If the model for our strategic response to Auckland's growth problems is one of partnership between Government and the market place, then Government must be far better equipped to be flexible, responsible and informed that we have ever been before. The pace of change is currently considerably in excess of our ability to respond and with the America's Cup silly season approaching, it is likely to get worse very soon.

I hope that this address has gone some way to explaining the nature of some of Auckland's problems and provided a view of the some solutions. We have taken the first steps in a new direction for Auckland. I only hope that we could now stop litigating each other for long enough to allow some real progress to be made on how to make this vision a reality. ■