

BY ERNST ZÖLLNER, DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

# A NEW DAWN FOR URBAN POLICY?

## THE GOVERNMENT MOVES TO ADDRESS URBAN ISSUES.

The management of our cities has a significant influence on national targets of wealth creation, environmental protection and community development. New Zealand's historic aversion to developing coherent urban policy frameworks has led to poor urban management practices that are threatening to turn our cities into long-term liabilities (Town and Country Planning Directorate, 1984; Parliamentary Commission for the Environment, 1998).

A highly urbanised nation cannot afford to manage its cities through policies that are not integrated or coordinated at the local level. A recent local government briefing paper highlighted the high burden of Government decisions that ignore the likely impacts on cities (Zöllner, 2003). Such decisions derail any local attempts at urban planning by (often dramatically) changing the way cities work or are structured.

Examples of policies from the last decade that were implemented without taking into account the effects on cities include:

- The removal of import tariffs on second hand vehicles
- Location of tertiary hospitals
- Parental choice for schooling
- Removal of post offices and banking facilities
- Changes to the immigration policies.

Recent initiatives by the Government may herald the end of this chronic neglect of cities in policy development and institutional arrangements. Without much explanation or debate the Government created a new Ministerial portfolio of Urban Affairs in July last year.' The new portfolio will receive a very small budget for dedicated policy and research support in the 2003104 financial year.'

The Government's intent with creating the new portfolio has become clearer in recent months through three important publications:

- The People + Places + Spaces urban design guide (Ministry for the Environment, 2002a)

- The new *Transport Strategy* for New Zealand (Ministry of Transport, 2002)

- The *Programme of Action for Sustainable Development* (Department Of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2003)

Taken together, these publications signal that urban affairs in New Zealand will be given a significantly higher priority, and that for the first time explicit and place-specific urban policies will be developed.

Urban policy will furthermore be developed within a sustainable development framework, i.e. 'urban affairs' is being re-defined as 'urban sustainability'. The initial focus for most new policy development will be Auckland's growth management issues, including the lack of integrated of transport and land use planning, economic development challenges, improved urban design and removing legislative barriers to urban intensification.'

Why is central government taking a sudden new interest in urban policy and management?

There appear to be three main drivers. The first is an increased realisation that macroeconomic policies may on their own not ensure that the nation's cities (and in particular Auckland) are competitive in the global marketplace for inward investment and immigration. It is now increasingly recognised that more place-specific initiatives by central government in the areas such as urban infrastructure, market development, place marketing and urban amenity are also required.


The second driver is the ongoing frustration among senior politicians and public sector managers at the lack of coordination or integration across policy portfolios. The far-reaching public sector reform over the last two decades has not delivered a satisfactory level of integrated whole-of-government planning and delivery at the local level, leading to some disappointing social and environmental outcomes in urban areas (Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 1998). In response the Government is promoting integration through a wide range of initiatives, including the new focus on the role urban policy and management in tackling the cross-cutting social and environmental issues.

And finally, New Zealand's national environmental policy agenda has also brought

cities and in particular urban management into the policy spotlight. New Zealand's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol on emissions have focused attention on transport planning and public transport infrastructure investment, again particularly in Auckland. There has recently been a significant increase in interest in the role that urban areas play in terms of the nation's overall environmental wellbeing.

What are the key issues that national policy should address?

A large gathering of urban managers, planners, designers and analysts in Wellington in 2002 set out the urban policy challenge for New Zealand (Ministry for the Environment, 2002b).

- Develop a national vision for urban New Zealand that provides leadership on issues such as urbanisation, population distribution and the management of cities, possibly through the mooted long-term urban strategy
- Develop an urban policy framework within which the impacts of national sector policies can be evaluated and, if required, amended. Such a framework should be based on an understanding of cities as dynamic open systems in which nearly every Government decision impacts on urban structure, form and functions
- Solve the specific "built environment" issues that are not being sufficiently addressed by other Government portfolios, e.g. urban amenity issues
- Promote integrated urban management in New Zealand. In respect of the Local Government Act, this should include increasing capacity of all players to engage in the long-term community planning processes in cities
- Promote research on urban issues, including addressing the inadequate funding and coordination of urban research in New Zealand. 

## REFERENCES

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## FOOTNOTES

1. This announcement follows the creation of an undefined and unfunded portfolio of "Minister for Auckland" in 1999.

2. The Government on 20 March 2003 announced the creation of a small new Urban Affairs Unit in 2003/04 financial year with a budget of \$750,000 that will fund five staff members. Secondments from Ministries and Departments will supplement these resources.

3. In March the Government set up a local-central government liaison group in Auckland to assist with the definition of a "Sustainable Cities" work programme for Auckland. The group is chaired by Colin Dale, chief executive, Manukau City Council.