



Submission: Auckland's Regional Public Transport Plan 2023 - 2031

15th August 2023

Business North Harbour Incorporated

Kevin O'Leary – General Manager
PO Box 303 126
North Harbour 0751
Phone 09 968 2222 or 0274 799 563

Email: kevin@businessnh.org.nz

Local Board Representation: Upper Harbour Local Board

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Auckland Transport

E-mail: rptp@AT.govt.nz.

Submission to Auckland Transport's Regional Public Transport Plan 2023 - 2031

Introduction

Business North Harbour (BNH) representing the North Harbour Business Improvement District welcomes the opportunity to make this submission on Auckland Transport's (AT) Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) 2023 - 2031.

BNH is a significant commercial and industrial Business Improvement District (BID), representing over 4,500 commercial property owners and businesses within the North Harbour area. Collectively they employ over 37,000 Auckland residents and ratepayers. The organisation is located within the Upper Harbour Local Board area, which remains one of the fastest growing areas in the country, in both absolute and percentage population terms, which brings both challenges and opportunities to the North Harbour business district.

BNH represents and works with a wide range of businesses comprising of a mix of sole traders, Small Medium Enterprises (SME), through to multi-national organisations, representing sectors such as ICT, business services, specialist manufacturing, light – medium warehousing, logistics, retail and hospitality. In addition, we have key educational institutions within or on our boundary, including Massey University Albany and AUT Millennium, along with a variety of primary and secondary schools including Rangitoto College, the largest secondary school in New Zealand.

Background

The Auckland Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) is the key document that sets out the future of public transport planning and investment in the Auckland region. It guides the design and delivery of public transport services, information, and infrastructure in Tāmaki Makaurau over the next eight years, split into short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes. The plan describes the public transport network that AT proposes for the region, identifies the services that are integral to the network, outlines the contractual units these services will sit in, and sets out the objectives and policies that apply to those services.

AT is seeking feedback on its Regional Public Transport Plan 2023 – 2031, stating: The draft RPTP outlines AT's proposals for Auckland's public transport system over the next 8-years. We want to hear your thoughts on the plan.

Our response, which is delivered from a business community perspective, is provided in summary and then answers AT's specific feedback questions which is:

1. What are your general comments on the RPTP?

BNH Feedback Summary:

One of BNH's objectives is to provide the most efficient, effective and amenable locations for business and investment within Auckland, making it the location of choice for business and property owners. If this is to be achieved, ease of movement and access to, in, around and out of the area is critical.

Based on the latest research from infometrics.com, it is evident that the productivity (GDP) of the North Harbour BID is already compromised, with congestion impacting on business functionality. The Upper Harbour Local Board area productivity (GDP) has under-performed the rest of Auckland in three of the last four years (2019 – 2022), despite the number of business units in the region increasing considerably more than the rest of Auckland in percentage terms over the same period. All of this equates to a significant economic cost, not only for our area, but on a regional and national level.

Additionally, the North Shore's population is projected to increase by 221,000 (2018-2043, according to Statistics NZ), or around 40 percent of the 520,800 more people the recent draft Auckland's Future Development Strategy claims are expected to live in Auckland over the next 30 years.

Based upon the above information, the transport and infrastructure priorities for BNH members are those contained in the RPTP which will enable:

- Easy access into and around the North Harbour Business Improvement District (BID) for business staff, customers and other visitors, thus minimising the cost to business of lost production if staff are delayed and reduced income if potential customers are unable to easily visit a business in a timely manner.
- Easy access into, around and out of the BID for trades people and business representatives again minimising the cost to business of lost production and enabling businesses in the area to access work projects and other opportunities in other parts of the region in a cost-effective manner.
- Efficient local transportation of goods and materials in, around and out of the BID, minimising the cost to business of congestion delays.
- Efficient transportation of goods and materials across and out of the region again minimising the cost to business of congestion delays.
- The provision of local connections to alternate modes of transport for goods and materials into and out of the BID other than just transportation by road.
- The transport and infrastructure systems to cope with the predicted population growth and housing intensification avoiding any increase in congestion and travel times for both people and goods.

(1) What are your general comments on the RPTP?

BNH agrees that a well-planned public transport network supported by high quality information and quality infrastructure gives public transport (PT) the potential to become the preferred travel choice for more Aucklanders, hopefully initiating the behavioural change required to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled, particularly in cars. This would hopefully reduce congestion on our roads enabling far more efficient movement of people, goods and materials for businesses, reducing the cost of lost production and transport delays that many businesses are currently incurring.

BNH acknowledges that AT is endeavouring to support Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri: Auckland's Climate Plan by reducing emissions through introducing low emission or no emission buses, trains and ferries to the fleet. We would however note that AT needs to ensure that the necessary charging infrastructure needs to be available within identified timeframes to enable all of these new travel modes to be fully operational at the earliest opportunity.

BNH would question AT's ability to reach the Climate Plan target of 550 million passenger journeys per year by 2030 outlined in the Transport Emissions Reduction Pathway (TERP) given that the mid-2023 figure sits at only 80 million.

BNH requests that the management of on and off-street parking under the Room To Move – Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland's Parking Strategy 2023, is undertaken in a transparent way, with genuine local consultation before any decisions are made, always taking into account the effects of any proposed changes on local businesses.

BNH agrees that to avoid adverse equity impacts, the implementation of congestion charging must be supported by significant improvements to PT, walking and cycling/micro-mobility modalities. Additionally, AT must ensure that adequate measures to protect those who can't use other modes are in place, particularly for businesses moving goods, materials or employees to other sites who must not be penalised with excessive charges for simply going about their normal business supporting the local, regional and national economies.

We agree that service improvements to add frequency to existing services and introduce new services is critical if people are to view PT journeys as an effective alternative to car journeys. Additionally, AT must ensure that the necessary major and smaller scale infrastructure projects required to facilitate an effective PT network and access to it, are completed to scale and on time. Infrastructure improvements can't solely focus on the direct needs of the transport network but must also include improving the infrastructure that gives patrons the ability to access PT services, thus making access to PT easier and more attractive to potential patrons.

BNH also agrees with the introduction of competition to keep PT pricing down as long as the service provider, if it isn't AT, doesn't compromise the level and reliability of the service. Additionally, BNH supports the feasibility of introducing local on-demand services provided that they are affordable and can effectively replace existing poor performing services, whilst giving customers a better experience.

The timeframes for the delivery of the plan take a logical approach, particularly the short-term focus which aims to address recent feedback to AT regarding the reliability or rather the lack thereof, of services and the recovery of patronage levels which remain well below pre-COVID levels. These are both inextricably linked as people who previously used PT will only return if the current levels and reliability of service improve. AT needs to get both reliability and patronage levels back to where they used to be as soon as is practicable, as improvements can only be viewed as credible once the previous levels have been exceeded.

BNH believes it is crucial that AT achieves these short-term goals as without them the ability of AT to deliver the remainder of this plan would be questionable at best. AT has stated on a number of occasions in the supporting documentation that the necessary funding to achieve many of the outcomes cannot be guaranteed, so it is imperative in the short-term that AT's income from patronage meets the levels required to guarantee their own funding commitments. Should this not be the case, trying to convince other funders to commit their financial support will prove extremely difficult, thus jeopardising many of the planned outcomes of the RPTP.

The range of service changes and improvements listed under the medium-term focus will doubtless all improve the PT network however, BNH has some concerns that the key infrastructure projects required to enable these changes to services may not be completed due to the financial constraints noted above.

BNH supports the improvement initiatives identified in the plan, particularly those on the North Shore which will hopefully enable more effective movement of goods and people in, around and out of the BID, thus improving business productivity and reducing the cost of transport delays to business.

BNH notes AT's concerns in the long-term focus, which echo our own concerns regarding Council's TERP targets, that ***'the funding we currently have will not enable us to meet these targets – significantly more operational funding would be required to run the number of services needed to carry the TERP's target of 550 million boardings per year by 2030. Achieving a network that would attract the full target would also need significant investment in infrastructure, to further improve journey times, enable more services, and improve the efficiency of supporting facilities'.***

Regarding the plan's **Vision** to:

Massively increase public transport use to reduce congestion, improve access for Aucklanders, support the economy and enhance the environment and

Goals:

1. Services Providing an excellent customer experience
2. Enhancing the environment and tackling the climate emergency
3. Safe and accessible transport for everyone
4. Integrating public transport into a growing Auckland
5. Funding and delivering public transport transparently

BNH would make the following observations:

- We admire the ambition of both the vision and goals but are somewhat concerned as to how AT is going to be able to achieve them all, particularly given the funding uncertainty noted in the supporting document and this submission.
- BNH fails to see how AT can achieve the TERP target of 550 million annual boardings by 2030 noted in Goal 2, when in Goal 1 reaching 150 million annual transport trips by 2031 is the target.
- BNH is concerned that AT's PT improvements and integration under Goal 4 will not be able to keep pace with the planned housing intensification and population growth.
- We believe that under Goal 5, in addition to the Local Boards as stated, AT must include the BIDs in collaborations and in meaningful and transparent engagement on plans and projects involving a BID area.

BNH acknowledges and supports AT's commitment to include Māori outcome initiatives throughout the RPTP.

Following the recent announcement regarding the Second Harbour Crossing, BNH acknowledges the inclusion of the project in the RPTP and asks that AT works collaboratively and quickly with the other agencies involved to bring the project to fruition in a far more timely manner than outlined, with work currently only scheduled to start 'by the end of the decade'. Whilst we appreciate the enormity of the project, we believe that the preparation schedule of another 6.5 years before work begins has to be reduced.

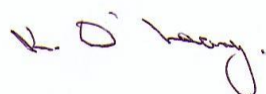
BNH trusts that all the policies required and affected by the implementation of the RPTP will be developed or amended within any required timeframes to enable the smooth and complete delivery of the outcomes noted in the RPTP.

Conclusion:

Overall BNH supports the Vision, Goals and Actions outlined in Auckland Transport's Regional Public Transport Plan 2023 – 2031. However, we would respectfully point to the various caveats to that support and requests contained in this submission which we would ask AT to take note of and give due consideration to as future development decisions are made and parts of the RTP are implemented.

Should there be any questions or other matters arising from this submission, we would be pleased to respond to these.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K. O'Leary'.

Kevin O'Leary
General Manager