

COLLABORATING FOR GOOD NETWORK PLANNING

A WAIKATO PT NETWORK REVIEW CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Successful provision of public transport cannot be achieved by any one organisation alone. At least three key parties must closely collaborate to deliver a truly integrated network.

In New Zealand, the model most commonly used to deliver public transport is where the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) and the regional council funds and contracts the service, the city or district council provides the infrastructure the network operates on and the bus company provides the buses and drivers that carry the customers. Together they must all be involved in the process.

Our paper examines the importance of collaboration amongst these key parties in the delivery of a full regional PT network review. From inviting parties to be part of a steering group, the project management groups, and technical working groups, through to targeted consultation, this paper examines each step in the planning process.

Learnings on successful collaboration include how the key parties were engaged, where their input added real value, and importantly, how the key parties communicated internally to ensure whole of organisation awareness and buy-in.

We will also provide insight into the journey taken by the network review through the traditionally tricky area of melding technical outputs with political requirements – by way of an upfront agreed communications process within the project structure. Often a very difficult task!

INTRODUCTION

Waikato Regional Council (WRC) is undertaking a strategic review of the way it provides public transport within the region.

The key purpose of the Strategic Network Review (SNR) is to determine the optimal form of a future network to meet the needs of the region by taking account of urban and rural land use, population and demographic changes.

A key tenet of the SNR is to develop an investment and planning methodology that can be used to ensure that public transport outcomes are optimised on the current and future network, so that available resources are prioritised to areas of greatest effect.

This approach will be a change to the current ethos that has seen the development of a “supply-side” network as opposed to one that can be viewed as efficient, effective and customer demand driven.

WRC commissioned Traffic Design Group (TDG) to assist Council to develop and deliver the review.

The Project team approach to the Strategic Network Review (SNR) is to focus on five key principles that will be at the core of the project, and communicated throughout as part of our stakeholder engagement:

- **Respond to differing regional needs:** Rural and urban areas have different transport needs that are defined by forecasted land use patterns, population growth, employment opportunities and community demographics.
- **Deliver services in a collaborative model:** Future effective provision of public transport in the region requires collaboration between regional, city and district councils, public transport operators and funding providers.
- **Ensure Value for Money:** Current budgetary constraints will require very careful and consistent expectation management throughout the project with stakeholders and WRC partners. A limited budget will however provide discipline on prioritising regional needs and demands to be serviced by the PT system.
- **Implement Best Practise:** The SNR provides an opportunity for application of applicable world best practise to deliver a highly efficient and effective bus network. Communications of the benefits of each best practise for stakeholder consideration will lead to superior outcomes.
- **Move from a supply to a demand led system:** The desire to progress from a supply focused network to one that is demand led and targeted at high priority regional needs is a core principle of this project.

The completed SNR will inform the next Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP). At this point general public consultation will be sought on the proposed new approach to delivery of public transport in the region. This approach is in alignment with Government policy, and should ensure optimised investment outcomes for both Waikato Regional Council and other districts within the region.

WHAT DID COLLABORATION MEAN TO THIS PROJECT?

We interpreted collaboration as the act of working together to achieve a goal. Importantly we think collaboration describes a recursive process where organisations work together to realise a shared goal – that being the successful delivery of a revised investment methodology.

Collaboration in our project meant the sharing of knowledge, learning and building understanding. WRC took a leadership role in developing a collaborative approach to the project by emphasising the benefits of the approach. Through a collaborative approach the Waikato public transport system would stand a better chance of securing national funding resource for both services and infrastructure.

Collaboration also means, from a local perspective, building stakeholder confidence in the project and the promise of joined up thinking and outcomes.

COLLABORATION vs. CONSULTATION

It is clear that involving key stakeholders from the very beginning of the project would, and has, led to better outcomes. Key stakeholders within the whole project were identified as:

- New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA)
- Territorial Authorities in the region (e.g. Hamilton City Council, Waipa District Council, Waikato District Council, South Waikato District Council and Taupo District Council)
- The disabled community (CCS Disability Action)
- Schools and tertiary institutions
- Bus operators
- Ministry of Education (MOE)
- District Health Board (DHB)
- Business associations
- Key businesses (e.g. Tainui Group)

However the ability to effectively and efficiently collaborate with every stakeholder was neither possible nor required. We therefore made a distinction between collaboration and consultation.

Project collaboration was deemed necessary between parties responsible for funding and delivery of the public transport network. This included NZTA, Hamilton City, districts and the regional council.

Consultation was required with the other key stakeholders (or representatives of) who would be affected by any changes to the network.

COLLABORATION FROM THE VERY BEGINNING

Need for project

This project has been well planned in advance as signalled through the 2011 Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP). The plan identified that service provision policies and actions should be updated given the need for optimisation of the network to ensure efficient and effective delivery of public transport services.

A national push from the NZTA to ensure that scarce resources are used efficiently, and enable performance to be measured against established benchmarks relating to patronage and revenue recovery levels has been also factored into the need for the review.

The Regional plan is widely consulted on and thus the need for the review is well recognised by key stakeholders.

Learning 1. Signal well in advance the need for a project and include in appropriate plans opportunities for early consultation on the need.

Project Scoping

WRC next commenced scoping of the project. Through the early part of 2012 the review scope was developed to enable procurement of independent advisors. The scoping documents were circulated to NZTA for input, as they are the key co-investor of this project.

Prior to the release of tender documents those involved in collaboration (as per list above) were informed of the proposed scope of the project to enable an early “heads up”

This ensured that whilst not all stakeholders needed to be involved in the detail, those most directly involved in the project process had an opportunity to add technical and high level input.

Learning 2. At a technical level, involvement of some but not too many key stakeholders allows for efficient use of time and resources. We chose our collaboration partners due to their direct responsibility for delivery of the service.

Procurement

The SNR is a Regional Council project deliverable with investment from NZTA. It was therefore appropriate for NZTA to be involved in procurement on the basis of approval of process, documents and in tender evaluation.

NZTA were invited to be part of the evaluation process, reviewed documentation and were part of the interview panel of the shortlisted consultants.

Learning 3. Gain confidence in procurement and project process through involvement of key investment partners.

Steering Group

The project has a steering group that includes senior officers from key stakeholders:

- NZTA
- Hamilton City Council
- Waikato District Council (representing larger district councils)

- South Waikato District Council (representing smaller district councils)

This group of officers will ensure the project is not only well delivered but key political considerations are managed at a high level. The steering group composition also ensures a good balance between both urban and rural needs.

Learning 4. As a technical study political involvement was not directly required, but political understanding was. As well as good management skills the steering group enabled the project to avoid political distractions that would have reduced project efficiency and possibly effectiveness.

EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

Learnings 1 to 4 show the benefits of early collaboration for efficient project delivery. The next consideration was using collaboration to improve the project outcome.

Choosing good workshop collaborators

Effective collaboration starts by choosing the right people to collaborate with.

On this project we used an extensive workshop approach to generate much of the project output. Where we identified specific organisations to be represented we targeted individuals within those organisations whom we knew would be:

- Representative,
- Willing, and
- Able

Our approach for representation included a prompt as to whom we thought might be most appropriate based on our previous experience.

Learning 5. Especially in a workshop environment, try to choose your stakeholder representatives by not only considering their technical merits but also through their proven ability to work well in a workshop environment.

Building a collaborative workshop environment

For our project we provided background information prior to the stakeholder workshops to both inform the attendee of what the workshop is about but also to allow pre-discussion within each stakeholder environment on issues they might want to explore internally beforehand.

Background information therefore not only included an agenda, but also reading material on best practice, a baseline review and examples of what the outcome of the workshop could deliver.

We expected that some workshop participants would attend with relevant data from their organisations which could provide evidence based discussion as required.

Learning 6. A good workshop will more likely be delivered where stakeholder representatives are well briefed and have had time to think about the workshop context in relation to their environment and gather relevant supporting data beforehand.

Further, collaboration within the workshop environment was fostered by using an experienced and well known facilitator.

James Bevan from Latitude Planning Services (LPS) joined with TDG in the project and as well as providing land use support for the SNR James also provided workshop facilitation. James is well known and respected in the Waikato transport planning community and has significant transport policy experience.

James' approach to workshop facilitation allowed the creation of a comfortable professional environment where participants were given;

- Respect for their time,
- Respect for their knowledge,
- Opportunities to share, and
- A sense of accomplishment as a result of their contribution.

Learning 7. To improve the effectiveness of a workshop consider whether engaging a facilitator based more for who they know rather than what they know (technically about the subject).

An iterative process

Collaboration suggests a process and our project embraced this approach. Figure 1 on page 8 illustrates this process.

We used a two-step workshop approach where stakeholders could firstly be provided with a wide context for consideration.

Because we were looking to develop an investment methodology that was demand driven rather than supply, the impacts of any suggested changes could not necessarily be produced at the end of one workshop.

Our project involved two sets of workshops, the first developing bookends to the investment methodology, the second discussing the impact of these bookends on the network and finding a potential agreed middle position.

The first series of workshops were split into two parts.

Workshop 1, part 1: Information gathering

Phase 1 introduced the Stakeholders to the project and created an understanding of the project principles agreed with WRC. It confirmed the project was working with a complete data set and tested assumptions such as the 30-year land use pattern, population demographics and modelling outputs.

Establishing 'hard limits' on fare recovery requirements did require determination and tact. Ensuring there was clear understanding that continued central government funding (via NZTA) relied on deliver of value for money – recognised through the fare box recovery ratio. Having an NZTA representative at the workshop was important to both reinforcing NZTA's interest in the process and allowing specific NZTA questions to be answered.

Phase 1, as well as presenting facts, also allowed stakeholders to discuss anecdotal evidence or views on the current performance of the network.

Workshop 1, part 2a (urban) & 2b (rural): Evaluation and assessment

The second part of the first workshop broke stakeholders into urban and rural groups. Because of some crossover of interests between urban and rural parts 2a and 2b (separate urban and rural workshops) were held at different times to allow co-attendance at both by key individuals.

We asked stakeholders what actions and targets from the SNR they thought most important for a demand led PT system. We asked them what showstopper there might be. They identified and discussed areas and issues which were potentially non-negotiable to each stakeholder.

Finally we asked the participants to agree on two diverse sets of parameters to be taken for testing.

The effect was the endorsement of the workshop to test two bookends. A supply led, socially focussed approach based on the current PT Plan at one end and a highly demand led, commercially focused bookend at the other.

Whilst the general outcome of the current approach is known, the effects of a very different approach would not have been possible to establish within one workshop.

A second of the series of workshops were therefore held following the technical evaluation of the 'bookends'.

Workshop 2a (urban stakeholders) and workshop 2b (rural stakeholders)

These workshops included the following items:

- Outline of progress of project.
- Presentation of results of bookend testing.
- Discussion on effects parameters had on results, and
- Facilitated agreement on defined parameters to enable a final network design.

The outcome required from these workshops was the final agreement on the framework by which decisions could be made about the future provision of services.

Learning 8. Stakeholders were more engaged in the workshop process when they understood that they could come back and refine their input based on the option testing. It enabled a 'second bite' at the issue following testing of their first ideas.

RECOGNISING COLLABORATION

WRC, from a policy perspective, encourages an open approach to consultation. Fundamentally Council understands the benefits and culturally, collaboration forms a key part of the Council's approach to working with the community it serves.

For this project, with the prospect of significant change to the delivery of public transport in the future, Council was particularly interested in ensuring its key stakeholder partners were not only involved, but were seen to be involved, and their efforts recognised.

Throughout the project, the involvement of key stakeholders was recognised and their priorities well publicised. By way of example, a key driver for NZTA is the need to deliver better value for their investment. One important indicator for them is the value of fares against cost of delivery, or the fare recovery ratio.

Nationally, NZTA is charged by central government to achieve 50% fare recovery ratio. For the Waikato region, currently on 32%, this meant a target of 40% by 2017 and 50% soon after that.

To assist the acceptance of change, all stakeholders, and ultimately the general public, would need to understand this key NZTA metric as an important driver of change. If a service isn't performing well it will be reviewed and assessed, and performance improved or the service discontinued.

For the past two years optimisation of the existing network has occurred resulting in the reallocation of resources, and where justified, their reinvestment into potential growth on both rural and urban networks.

The Waikato region does not have the advantages of an Auckland model which has an integrated organisation able to look after both transport services and its infrastructure.

In the region, the regional council procures and administers the bus services but the city and district councils provide the supporting infrastructure such as shelters, interchanges and bus priorities. This arrangement is not always clear to all stakeholders but the requirement to collaborate closely is a critical factor in efficient and effective delivery of public transport.

For Hamilton City Council, investment in public transport on particular corridors is a priority because the ability to increase capacity for private vehicles is highly constrained.

Hamilton City's investment decisions, as were many of the other councils of the region, were however balanced by their wish to acknowledge social equity issues. Stakeholders needed to understand their position on this.

Learning 9. All publicity, publications and presentations should include and clarify the role of key stakeholders in the process. Importantly, key issues of each stakeholder should be recognised, agreement to outcomes emphasised and where required the reasons for decisions not unanimously agreed noted.

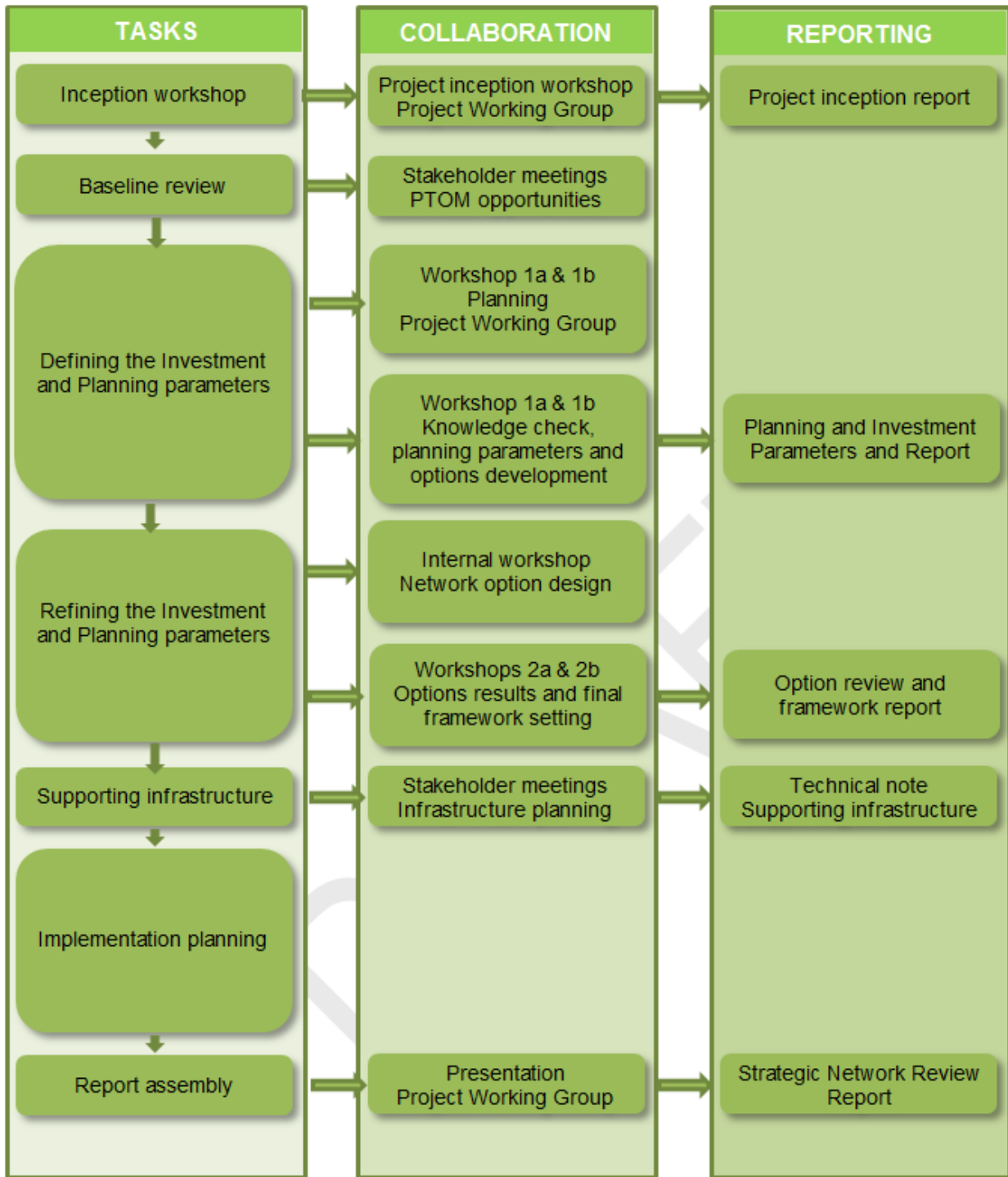


Figure 1 Collaboration Framework

CONCLUSION

Transport in the Waikato Region cannot be successfully delivered by any one party. Without an integrated and coordinated approach investment outcomes will not be optimal.

To achieve best outcomes, in a constrained financial environment, tough questions need to be asked and difficult decisions made as to why? and how? services are funded and delivered.

Understanding of stakeholder needs and outcomes, engagement, and the development of options need to evolve in an open environment so that the “journey” can take place.

The collaborative approach adopted by the Waikato Region has enabled an effective network review to occur in a structured and constructive way, and ensured that a balance was maintained recognising the different user groups and communities within the region.

The strategic network review is the first stage of the “journey”. It was important that stakeholders understood that this was the first stage - and that it was not deciding new lines on maps. Professionals should note that setting correct expectations of project outcomes, right at the beginning, was critical to success in this instance.

The second stage of the journey will be the development of a new Regional PT Plan, enabling public consultation and feedback to be considered, through a prioritised list of actions and policies.

The third and final stage is the application of the PT Plan and the tendering and procurement of the new network, and importantly alignment of future infrastructure programmes within the region.

Are there disadvantages in this approach? Yes, the time effective collaboration can take. A command driven approach would be quicker to deliver. A purely technical approach which might essentially be modelling driven may not suit a collaborative approach.

However the investment in collaboration at the early stage of the journey should not be viewed as negative but as a benefit that results in having better outcomes for all those involved.

REFERENCES

Planning documents

Waikato Regional Council (2011). *Regional Public Transport Plan 2011-2021*.