

IS A 'FRAMEWORK' A SMARTER WAY?

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ABSTRACT

As with many transport projects, the complex web of interconnected plans and projects in Auckland's city centre had been difficult to clearly articulate to stakeholders and the public. There was a need to find a smarter way to convey the information in a simple, clear manner which did not require the development of 'yet another plan'. The use of a 'Framework' document solved these issues, by not being a plan, strategy or other formal document, and by adopting a stylised approach to explain complex project purposes and interdependencies in a simple and repeatable way. The Framework approach also resolved issues around consultation and approval, as the document had no official status and yet became a reference document that explained what was happening in the city centre. Importantly, the Framework was also able to provide context for investment decisions by NZTA, Auckland Transport and Auckland Council, as well as private investors. The presentation will outline the genesis, scope and learnings from the Framework process, so that smarter approaches can be taken to progressing projects.

INTRODUCTION

The Auckland region is going through a time of significant growth, change and development, with particular focus on the city centre, as the powerhouse for the region and country's economy. There are a number of significant transport projects planned to accommodate the city centre growth and deliver upon Auckland Council's liveability aspirations.

Auckland Transport (AT) and the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) have adopted a 'One Network' approach to the planning of the region's transport system, and are collaborating on city centre transport matters. This includes the telling of a coherent story of how the two organisations intend to manage and develop the city centre transport system.

The complex web of interconnected plans and projects in the city centre had been difficult to clearly articulate to stakeholders and the public. In particular, there was a need to find a smarter way to convey the information in a simple, clear manner which did not require the development of 'yet another plan'. There were already a number of formal 'plans' and 'strategies' – both statutory and non-statutory – and adding to these would not help deliver the messages clearly.

CITY CENTRE CONTEXT

AT is a Council Controlled Organisation (CCO) and is required to deliver upon Council objectives and plans, notably the Auckland Plan, a comprehensive, long-term strategy released in 2012 which sets out the region's growth and development direction. It sets objectives to "move to outstanding public transport within one network" and "radically improve the quality of urban living".

The city centre is identified in the Auckland Plan as one of two priority areas (the other being the Southern Initiative) and as such extra effort has been spent in developing plans for the area. The Auckland Plan states that *"the transformation of the city centre is essential to provide a cultural and economic heart for Auckland, so that it is a great place to live, work and play, and makes an essential contribution to our economic growth"*.

Sitting under the Auckland Plan, the Council in 2012 also released the City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) to set out more specifically how the city centre will develop into a higher quality urban centre.



Figure 1: City Centre Masterplan cover

The CCMP sets out eight 'Transformational Moves', nearly all of which have transport implications. The Moves include:

- Harbour Edge 'Stitch' - uniting the waterfront with the city centre
- East-West 'Stitch' - connecting the western edge of the city to the centre
- City Rail Link (CRL) - new public transport stations and development opportunities
- Green Link - connecting Victoria Park, Albert Park and Auckland Domain
- City to the Villages - connecting the city and the fringe

The CCMP also lists a number of key factors or projects of relevance to transport planning, including accommodating the movement needs of a total of 140,000 workers and 45,000 residents, completing the CRL by 2021, the additional Waitemata Harbour crossing within 10-20 years and an airport rail connection within 20 years, as well as providing for the continued operation of the port and cruise terminals. The CCMP contains a number of aspirational images showing city centre streets devoid of most traffic, containing large number of pedestrians and in some cases a light rail system. It was not clear from the CCMP how city centre access or traffic demands would be met.



Figure 2: Image from CCMP of future Quay St streetscape

As well as the CCMP, Waterfront Auckland (another CCO) released an overlapping document called the Waterfront Plan, which similarly set expectations for growth, development and transport changes, without clarity from AT's perspective as the road-controlling authority on how these were to be achieved. Whilst AT took part in the development of the CCMP and Waterfront Plans, the transport elements (or implications) were not necessarily in line with AT planning at the time and were considered to be aspirational. However, the use of the imagery in these documents has raised public expectations as to what is to be delivered.

As well as the aspirational documents, city centre development is also influenced by more formal plans, including the District Plan (and its replacement, the Unitary Plan), the Long Term Plan (the Council's budget programme) and AT's equivalent, the Integrated Transport Programme (ITP) and Regional Land Transport Programme (RLTP). The ITP sets out the transport projects for the region, and includes a number of projects within the city centre.

Beneath these documents lie a large number of other technical reports, strategies or plans from a range of stakeholders, such as the Waitemata Local Board (which has created a Local Board Plan, the Ponsonby Rd Plan, and various Precinct Plans). There is also the Auckland Economic Development Strategy, which emphasises the importance of the city centre and access to it.

These documents are all from the wider Council family and exclude NZTA matters. NZTA has its own set of guiding plans, notably the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport Funding (the GPS) which NZTA must give effect to through investment in land transport infrastructure and services that deliver on the government's desired outcomes. The motorway network around the city centre is influenced by the State Highway Asset Management Plan (SHAMP), which set out upcoming projects and desired levels of service. These activities are all operating within the context of the National Land Transport Programme (NLTP).

Both AT and NZTA also have a long list of studies, investigations and project evaluations, undertaken for parts of the city centre over many years. In AT's case, there are also several incomplete or obsolete city centre transport plans or strategies, including the Central Area Access Study (CAAS). Recent work by AT, particularly for the CRL business case has developed a large set of technical documents, notably the City Centre Future Access Study (CCFAS), the CRL Integrated Transport study (CRIT) and the City East West Transport Study (CEWT).

In this environment of a plethora of plans, strategies and studies - all covering some aspects of city centre transport - it is not surprising that there is often confusion as to which document takes precedence. From the Council perspective, the Auckland Plan takes precedence, with the CCMP setting out more detail under that, however it is not clear how those proposals could actually occur and how they relate to AT and NZTA's programmes.

CITY CENTRE INTEGRATION

With so many plans in place, a decision was made to move towards a focus of large-scale delivery. To achieve co-ordination between the multiple organisations, a new overseeing group was formed – the City Centre Integration group (CCI) – and made responsible for the delivery of more than 40 capital projects in the city centre. The CCI team works across the Council and CCOs to coordinate and integrate delivery and decision-making in the city centre.

CCI work under the same set of planning documents but is the agency responsible for coordinating the works. It was soon determined that the existing documents did not clearly relate to each other or show how projects could be delivered in an integrated manner to achieve the stated goals.

In particular they did not relate clearly to the five spatial priority areas which the city centre was grouped into: Victoria Quarter, Wynyard Quarter, Learning Quarter, Downtown, and Aotea Precinct. These areas are grouped by clusters of overlapping projects, for instance the Downtown area contains public projects relating to bus, rail, waterfront, cruise and streetscape improvements, as well as significant private projects such as the Downtown Shopping Centre redevelopment and Britomart precinct. These projects rely on each other to be truly effective, and CCI's aim is to coordinate them to be more efficient and to achieve greater benefits for the wider city centre.

Additionally, there was a sense of 'consultation fatigue' whereby a large amount of effort was going into developing planning documents and consulting upon them, but comparatively little was being built from those efforts. NZTA also raised a concern that applications for co-investment in city centre transport projects were being received, but it was not clear how they fitted – and integrated – in with all the other projects and initiatives underway.

FRAMEWORKS

Within this context a new set of documentation emerged - Frameworks. These documents distil the strategic direction for each quarter or precinct and show how specific projects from the Council family and the private sector will be integrated together to deliver upon planned outcomes.

Frameworks adopt a stylised approach to explain complex project purposes and interdependencies in a simple and repeatable way. Frameworks incorporate evolving projects and help link initiatives and inform decisions. The ever-changing nature of development means Frameworks are 'living' documents which evolve as new material comes available.

The use of a Framework document solves the issue of yet more consultation (and hence delays or risks) on already consulted projects and issues, by not being a plan, strategy or other formal document. The Framework approach also resolves issues regarding approvals, as the document has no official status and yet is a reference document that explains what was happening in the city centre. Importantly, the Framework is also able to provide context for investment decisions by NZTA, AT and the Council, as well as private investors.

The content is deliberately highly graphical and provides a lens through which clear consistent language is used to explain the spatial elements and relevant projects. Little technical jargon or detail is used and text is kept to a minimum. An implementation plan is outlined, covering the timing and costs of all the relevant projects in that area – both public and private – but the budgetary approvals remain in other places (e.g. the RLTP and Council's LTP).

Frameworks fit between consulted and approved strategic plans and detailed project documentation, where specific approvals and public consultation would occur. Frameworks are non-statutory and are not publicly consulted on – although consultation with key external stakeholders does occur, and the documents will become publicly available once completed. The documents exist to tell a story of what will happen, not to ask people what they would like to have happen – plenty of preceding documents had done that. An overview of where Framework documents sit is shown in Figure 3 below, from the Downtown Framework.



Figure 3: Overview of the Downtown Framework context

THE NEED FOR A TRANSPORT FRAMEWORK

Whilst Frameworks were originally developed for specific area-based precincts, it soon became clear that the city centre transport elements needed to be outlined in a wider network context rather than place by place.

It was therefore agreed that a City Centre Transport Framework was required, and a similar document may also be required for other overarching strategic topics requiring a broader context, such as economic activity, sustainability or public realm topics. The area-based Frameworks include material on these matters but only in relation to that location. The difference between 'strategic' Frameworks and 'area-based' Frameworks is portrayed in Figure 4 below:



Figure 4: How the two types of Frameworks relate to other planning activity

Through CCI, AT and NZTA in collaboration with Auckland Council committed to coordinate the production of a City Centre Transport Framework and in doing so provide a transport narrative for the city centre.

This did not seek to relitigate past work, or define specific transport projects, but simply aimed to more broadly articulate the city centre's overall transport strategy, for both AT and NZTA. The document also sought to show transport's role in a creating a stronger, more accessible and more liveable city centre and unlocking economic growth for Auckland as a whole. The intent of this document was to set the framework for good decision making and to establish principles that will lead to better transport infrastructure in the city centre.

The Transport Framework helps to actualise the transport elements of the Auckland Plan and CCMP, providing signals that frame the Council/AT investment direction for the ITP. Specifically, the document assists in the following:

- Identify the high priority problems and opportunities that must be addressed
- Present the expected benefits that the transport investment will provide
- Explain why, what and how AT and NZTA are planning to invest in the city centre's transport system

The Framework was informed by a number of key documents and strategies, including the following:

- Government Policy Statement
- Auckland Plan
- Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan
- City Centre Masterplan
- Integrated Transport Programme

It should be noted that due to NZTA's involvement, the Transport Framework's co-investment considerations are set in a national context, requiring reference to the Government Policy Statement, so the document differs slightly from other Frameworks which are more Auckland-centric. Whilst making a strong case for the funding imperative in the city centre, the document also showed that this aligns with government-sanctioned funding directives.

The Transport Framework is intended for use with many different audiences and purposes. In particular, the audience includes Councillors and significant city centre stakeholders (e.g. major developers and landowners). For these stakeholders, the purpose of this document is to provide the critical link between creating a globally competitive city centre and the requisite transport investment by both Council (through AT) and NZTA.

The Framework explains the intention to achieve such a transformation by better defining transport expectations and outlining investment direction over the next 30 years. As the stylised graphic (from the Downtown Framework) below shows, key movements of each mode are clearly articulated amidst the future development context but the detail of how these movements will be designed or delivered is not shown.

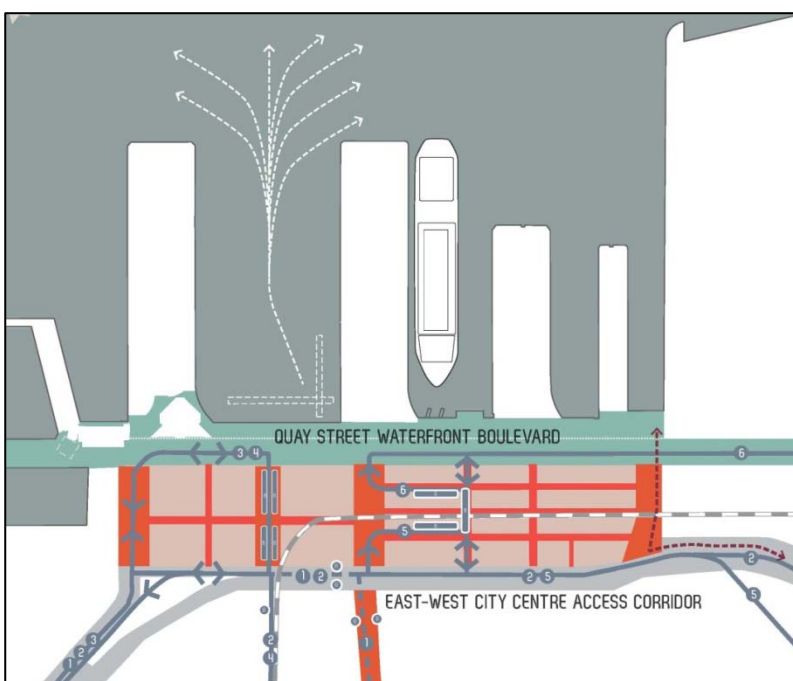


Figure 5: Example of Framework stylised graphics (Key in Figure 6)

NZTA plans to use it as a high level strategic document for investment decisions and as such does not need detailed project information, but rather a focus on outcomes/investment signals. The Framework will sit outside of NZTA's Business Case approach but it is hoped the document will help improve the development of future business cases for city centre transport projects. For the Business Case approach, the document informs the project's 'point of entry'.

The general public is also a key audience and the City Centre Transport Framework should give them confidence that there is a transport strategy for the city centre and that their rates are being well spent. The document needs to be written with the general public in mind and avoid technical jargon, excessive use of acronyms, etc. Lastly, it was suggested that there will be local city centre audiences, regional audiences and national audiences and the document needs to speak effectively to each of these different groups.

The figure below is an example of the level of detail that the Downtown Framework gave for 'movement', which encompassed all transport elements for that area. This also includes the key for the image in Figure 5 above.

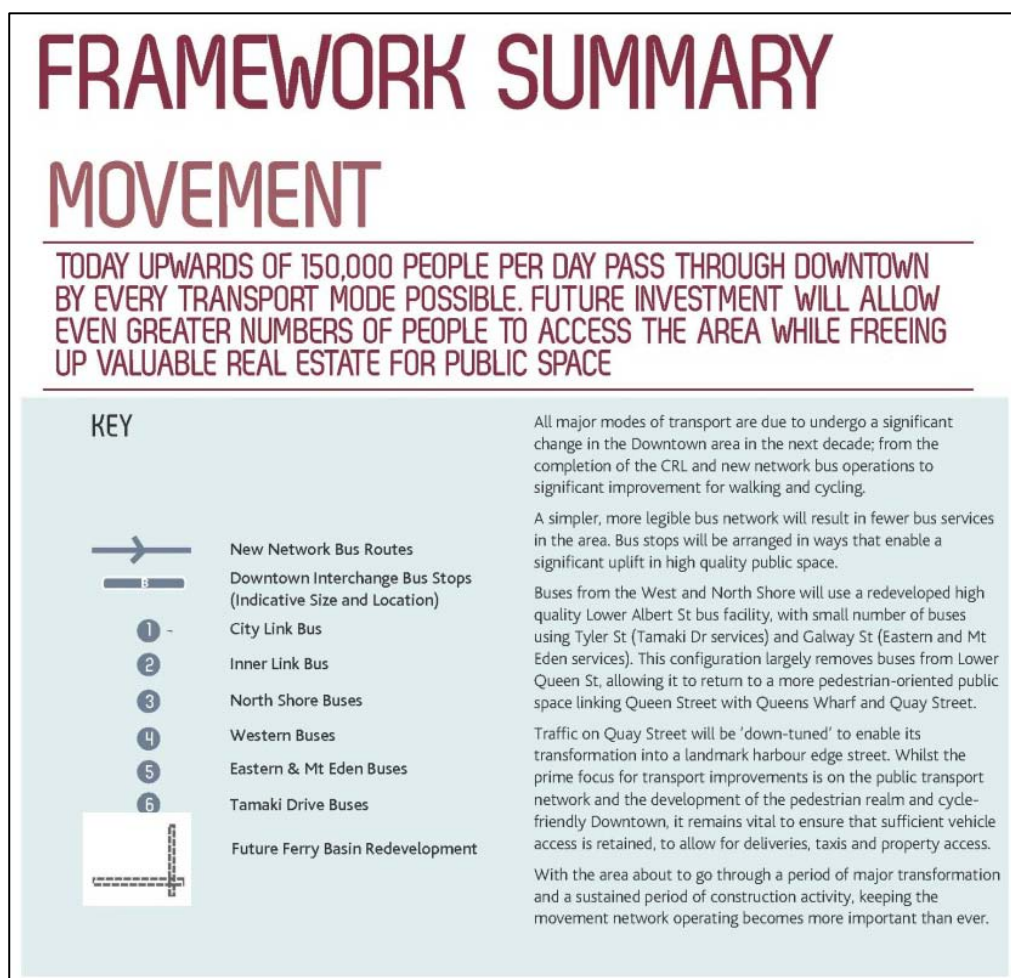


Figure 6: Downtown Framework 'movement' section text

FRAMEWORK CREATION PROCESS

At the time of writing, the City Centre Transport Framework was still under development (although it should be available for detailed analysis for the conference presentation of this paper). The Framework covers the wider city centre area, including the city fringe area just outside of the motorway network. Many city centre documents focus only on the city centre core and do not consider the surrounding area, which a transport system obviously needs to do. Figure 7 provides a map illustrating the geographic area of focus.

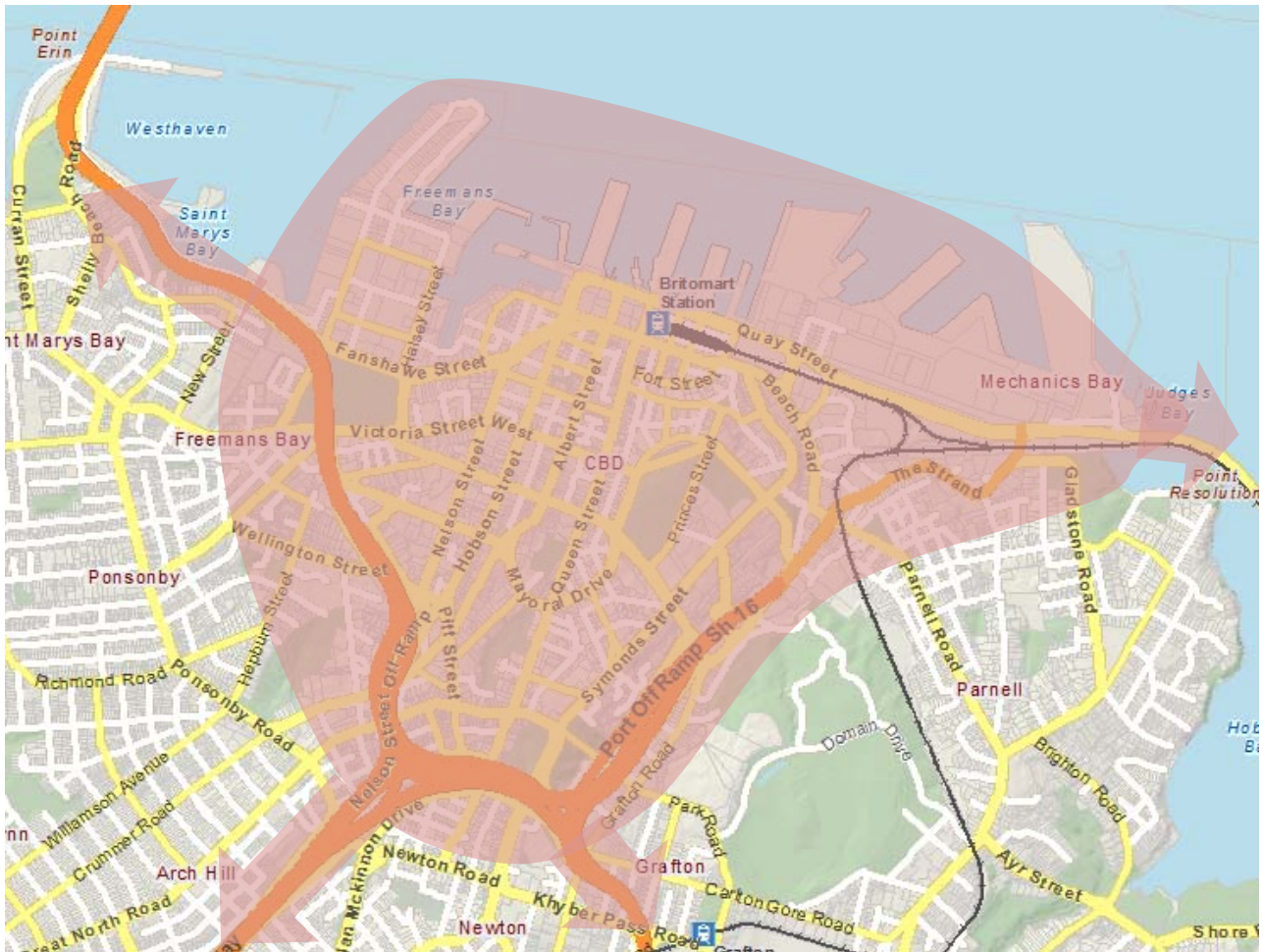


Figure 7: City Centre Transport Framework geographic scope.

As most of the document's material is already compiled (from sources such as the City Centre East West Transport Study, City Centre Future Access Study, City Rail Integrated Transport Study, etc.), the bulk of the work required for the new document involved editing and revising to match current themes, collation of suitable imagery and updating of transport statistics.

The summary structure for the Framework is outlined below:

Part 1 – Introduction

- Purpose
- Scope
- Guiding documents
- Vision
- What the Framework does

Part 2 – The drivers of change

- Growth pressures
- Role within NZ and the world, international competitiveness
- History of the city centre
- Global transport trends

Part 3 – Challenges, dynamics and organising ideas

- Place-based challenges
- Transport challenges
- Dynamics and synergies
- Organising ideas

Part 4 – Key themes

- Key movements
- Development context
- Public space and place-making context
- Transport overview
- Network overviews – rail, bus, ferry, walking, cycling, freight, traffic, parking
- Major projects – City Rail Link, additional Waitemata Harbour crossing

Part 5 – Programmes and outcomes

- Key programmes overview
- Key project summaries

Part 6 – Investment signals

- Investment expectations
- Performance variables
- Investment direction
- Factors to consider
- Setting direction

Part 7 – Delivery

- Programme
- Next steps
- Glossary

FRAMEWORK APPROVAL PROCESS

A Project Steering group was established with representation from CCI, Council departments (the Auckland Design Office, Regional and Local Planning, Transport and Infrastructure Strategy), Auckland Tourism Events and Economic Development (ATEED), AT (including the CRL team) and NZTA. Other members of the Council family (notably Waterfront Auckland and Ports of Auckland) were closely involved through updates and opportunities to inform the Framework's development.

The engagement process involved briefing internal (Local Boards, etc.) and external stakeholders (such as mana whenua, business associations, transport advocates and key developers) of the creation of the Framework and seeking input on the content.

Auckland Council's Auckland Development Committee (ADC), which ultimately was asked to endorse the Framework, was also briefed. Following completion of a draft document, the internal and external stakeholders were again engaged for feedback, with the revised document presented to the CCI Project Control Group for approval. CCI then presented the Framework to the ADC for endorsement before public release.

NZTA undertook a separate internal approval process in parallel and included engagement with the NLTP Advisory Group ahead of seeking approval from the NZTA Board.

CONCLUSIONS

A Framework document – a non-statutory and un-consulted reference document – is a useful tool to articulate a way forward without having to relitigate past work or define specific projects.

This allows a more graphical and conceptual narrative to be told, without the restrictions of either project detail or the restrictions of formal local government documents.

The City Centre Transport Framework is able to more broadly articulate the importance of transport strategy in creating a more accessible, liveable and vibrant city centre. The intent of this document was to create a framework for good decision-making by investors and to establish principles that will lead to better transport infrastructure in the city centre.

The ability to use highly graphical stylised material, which fit within a palette of other area-based Frameworks, meant many usual conventions and restrictions were released and a greater story could be told. As the story wasn't too technical and wasn't a 'hard and fast' proposal, a more descriptive narrative was able to be told. And within the complex Auckland city centre context, this proved a vital tool to advance transport projects.

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