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How to effectively engage the public in future growth areas

Transport Networks for Growth Programme

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ABSTRACT

Auckland is expected to grow by up to one million people by 2043¹. Most of this growth will occur in existing urban areas, but around 25% of this growth is anticipated to occur in future urban areas. This practice paper discusses the consultation approaches undertaken to effectively engage with the public and businesses to identify the preferred transport network for the future growth areas. The scale, significance and high public interest in New Zealand's largest Programme Business Case meant that this project needed to use best practice collaborative engagement strategies. A key challenge for this project was ensuring meaningful engagement with the public in future growth areas when most of the people who will be living there aren't there yet. An important factor for successful consultation was uniting the three partner organisations for the project and in the consultation approach. Other key learnings include: early engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders; being open and transparent throughout the project; and using innovative ways to communicate what is envisaged in the growth areas. It was also important to achieve a balance between demonstrating that there is a plan for growth while at the same time encouraging original thinking.

¹ Statistics NZ high growth projections, 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Transport Networks for Growth Programme (previously known as Transport For Future Urban Growth) identifies a future transport network for the future growth areas in Auckland. This practice paper discusses the consultation approaches undertaken to effectively engage with the public to identify the preferred transport network. The scale, significance and high public interest in New Zealand's largest Programme Business Case meant that this project needed to use best practice collaborative engagement strategies. A key challenge for this project was ensuring meaningful engagement with the public in future growth areas when the local communities and surrounding areas are going to change substantially over 30 years, and when most of the people who will be living there aren't there yet.

The paper outlines the challenges faced by the project team in undertaking effective collaboration and it discusses the key themes of the consultation approach developed. It will note the specific engagement tools and techniques used.

BACKGROUND

Auckland is expected to grow by up to one million people by 2043². Most of this growth will occur in existing urban areas, but around 25% of this growth is anticipated to occur in future urban areas. The Auckland Unitary Plan (Operative in part) has identified around 15,000 hectares of greenfield land for future urban growth. This corresponds to around 110,000 new dwellings and 50,000 new jobs over the next 30 years in the new growth areas.

The future growth areas (see Figure 1) are:

- The South: Takanini, Opaheke-Drury, Drury West, Paerata and Pukekohe
- The North: Wainui and Silverdale-Dairy Flat
- Warkworth
- The North West: Whenuapai, Red Hills, Kumeu-Huapai and Riverhead

Auckland Transport, Auckland Council and the NZ Transport Agency formed the Transport Network for Growth project team, working in partnership to develop a Programme Business Case (the 'Programme') to identify the future transport network for these growth areas.

² Statistics NZ high growth projections, 2013

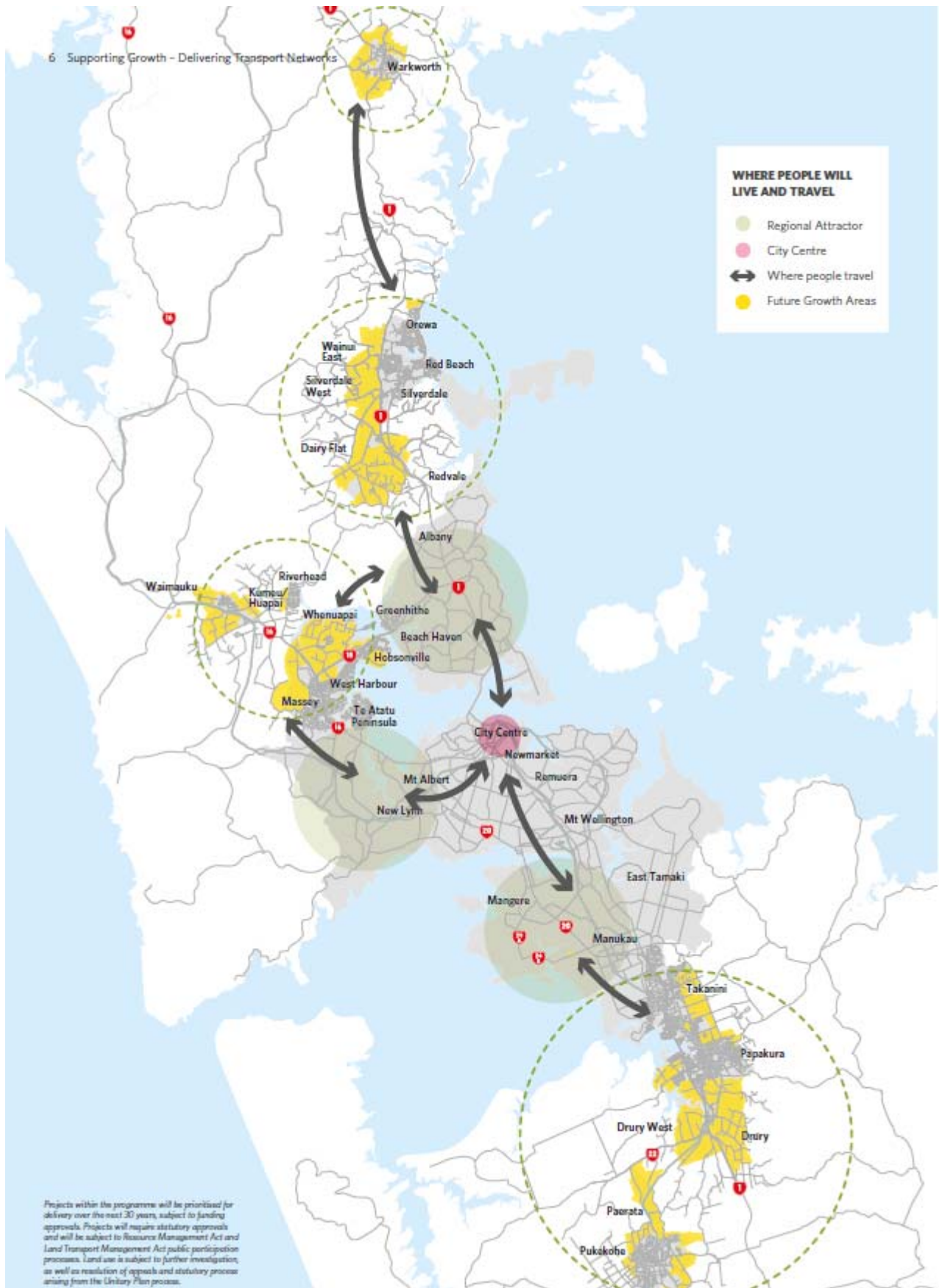


Figure 1 Future Growth Areas and Regional Attractors

KEY CHALLENGES

The main challenges faced by the project team in undertaking effective consultation were:

- How to engage with the public on future growth areas when the people and businesses that will be there in the future aren't there yet
- Only having a short time-frame (eight months) available to undertake meaningful engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and mana whenua³.
- Addressing the negative perception from the public regarding the impact of growth
- Successfully communicating the scale and degree of change anticipated
- Maintaining an emphasis on future plans when public thinking is focussed around existing issues/ problems in that geographic area

These key challenges are discussed further below.

Engaging with public in future growth areas when people aren't there yet

A key challenge for the project team was ensuring that consultation took into consideration the views and aspirations of future residents and workers in the growth areas. While there are existing communities and businesses in the future growth areas that can be identified, a unique aspect of this project was that the biggest group of stakeholders would be those future populations that are currently not living there now. In response to this challenge, the project adopted a region-wide approach to consultation as well as engaging with local groups. The project team also sought feedback from professional groups such as the Young Planners Committee of the New Zealand Planning Institute, to gain the latest ideas and thinking on transport and land use planning.

Short time-frame available to consult with a wide range of stakeholders

There was only a short time frame available (eight months) to complete the Programme Business Case due to:

- The urgency to respond to the housing supply shortage in Auckland
- The time line of Council's Future Urban Land Supply Strategy which sets out the order in which future urban land is supplied for development
- Existing development pressures and current transport issues

Negative perception from public regarding the impact of growth

In the future growth areas there is evidence of existing issues on the transport system, which will be further exacerbated by the anticipated growth.

To address the negative perception regarding the impact of growth, consultation for the Transport Networks for Growth Programme project focussed on:

- Ensuring transport for new areas is well-connected to the big picture and how these communities can best benefit from it
- Ensuring plans for these new areas enhance the investment already underway

The project team needed to show a balance between demonstrating that some planning was already underway incorporating previous consultation exercises and investigations, while also being open to new suggestions and original thinking.

³ Mana whenua, also known as iwi and hapū, is a term used to describe Māori who have tribal links to Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. There are 19 iwi (tribal groups) authorities who represent mana whenua interests in Tāmaki Makaurau [website] <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz> (accessed 18 February 2017)

Communicating the scale and degree of change expected

In some of the future growth areas, development is already underway and the communities can see the effects of change. However, in other parts the land is still predominantly rural and is expected to change substantially as it urbanises. In order to engage effectively with stakeholders it was important to convey the degree of change anticipated and what the future urban areas might look like. However, this calls for more innovative visual and communication tools than maps or diagrams.

Maintaining an emphasis on future plans rather than existing issues

The Transport Networks for Growth Programme has a 30 year time-frame, but each community will have transport issues that are current and of particular interest. To maintain a focus on future plans, the consultation approach, tools and questions needed to focus thinking around future plans and scenarios and not only on current issues.

How the project team responded to these key challenges is discussed below in describing the themes of the consultation approach.

CONSULTATION APPROACH

The key themes of the consultation approach developed for the Transport Networks for Growth Programme were:

- Uniting the three agencies (the NZ Transport Agency, Auckland Transport and Auckland Council) for the project and in the consultation approach
- Early engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and mana whenua
- Maintaining open and transparent customer focussed communication
- Innovative ways in communicating what is envisaged in the growth areas
- Achieving a balance between demonstrating that there is a plan for growth while also encouraging original thinking
- Incorporating best practise transport and land use planning

These themes and how they address the key challenges identified above are now discussed.

Uniting the three agencies

An important factor for successful consultation was forming a partnership between the NZ Transport Agency, Auckland Transport, and Auckland Council for the project and in the consultation approach. This ensured a unified message and demonstrated to the public that the agencies are working together to tackle the growth challenges and achieve the same goals and outcomes. It demonstrated to key stakeholders, developers and the public that the three agencies are being proactive in providing integrated transport and land use solutions, helping to address any negative perception of growth, as identified above as a key challenge.

Working in partnership also stream-lined the consultation approach and made more efficient use of resources. This helped to address the challenge of having only a short time-frame available to undertake extensive consultation through combining consultation planning and resources. The joint approach avoided the potential risk for confusion, particularly in areas where other projects by the three organisations are underway. It also enabled an opportunity to consult on other plans and projects underway and provide a 'one stop shop' for consultation in a particular geographic area.

Early engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and mana whenua

A defining feature of this project was consulting at an earlier stage of the planning process than traditionally is the case for transportation projects. The aim of the Programme consultation was to identify a future network, which represents the high level planning phase in Figure 2 below. Consultation on transport projects often focusses on the design of individual corridors or projects, whereas for the Transport Networks for Growth Programme this will occur later in the process.

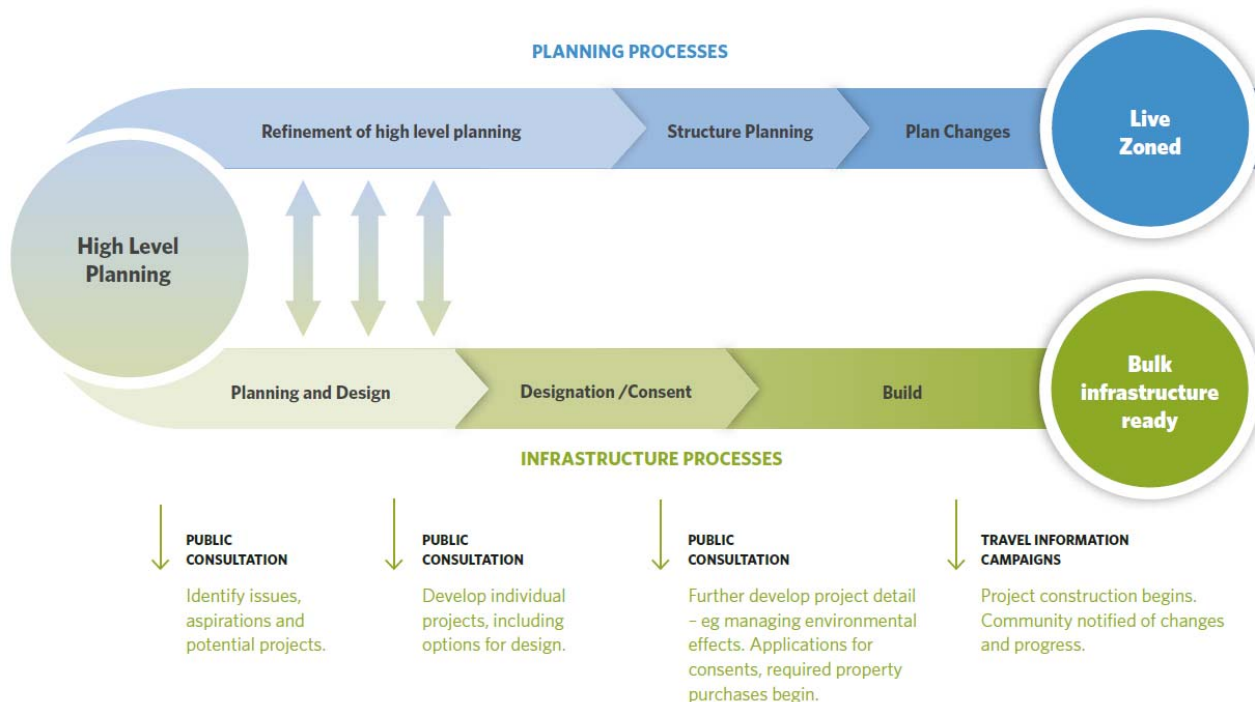


Figure 2 Planning process for the Transport Networks for Growth Programme

The project involved two rounds of extensive external stakeholder and public consultation, with the first in February 2016 following the long-list workshops, and the second in April-May 2016, after the short-listing process. The project employed a variety of tools and forums to consult with a wide range of stakeholders – see Table 1 below. Mana whenua were engaged in a parallel work stream.

Stakeholders	Engagement tools and forums
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General public • Local residents and businesses • Local Boards • Business associations • Auckland Business Forum • Young Planners Committee of the New Zealand Planning Institute • Auckland Council-Controlled Organisations (Watercare, Panuku Development Auckland) • Waikato and Northland councils • Ministry of Education • Key private developers • The Property Council • Bike Auckland • Automobile Association • Transpower • Public health bodies • Emergency services • New Zealand Defence Force 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open day events • Information Days in each area • Voting of preferences • Paper/ online feedback forms • Workshops • Individual meetings • Online business survey • External stakeholder and business breakfasts • Stakeholder feedback received by post or email • Comments received on Transport Blog • Developer meetings • Local Board Meetings

Table 1 Programme stakeholders and engagement methods

The consultation approach involved engaging with mana whenua as Treaty Partners, to ensure that the history and cultural significance of the areas is taken into account when making decisions, when delivering infrastructure and to support Māori development aspirations. Mana whenua expressed a desire to be involved in the earliest stages of the project. A mana whenua engagement work stream ran parallel to the wider stakeholder engagement process. Twenty two

collective mana whenua hui were held over a six month period with a total of fourteen mana whenua groups participating in at least one of these hui.

Mana whenua were clear that their values must be considered throughout the development of the project. As a way of ensuring early consideration and collation of mana whenua information, a set of mana whenua values were developed to be incorporated in the multi-criteria assessment and project objectives. These values will also inform successive phases of the project.

The consultation included a series of Information Days in each area (see Figure 3). These offered local residents and other interested parties an opportunity to learn more about the proposed plans and have their say about future transport network improvements in the area. Attendees were invited to submit their feedback directly to Auckland Transport by post or email. There was also an online feedback form available, with links to this on the Auckland Transport website.



Figure 3 Information Day in Pukekohe

Figure 4 below provides an overview of the feedback received during consultation on the Transport Networks for Growth Programme. The level of feedback and attendance at Open Days demonstrated a high level of interest and participation in the project and provided feedback from a wide range of stakeholders.

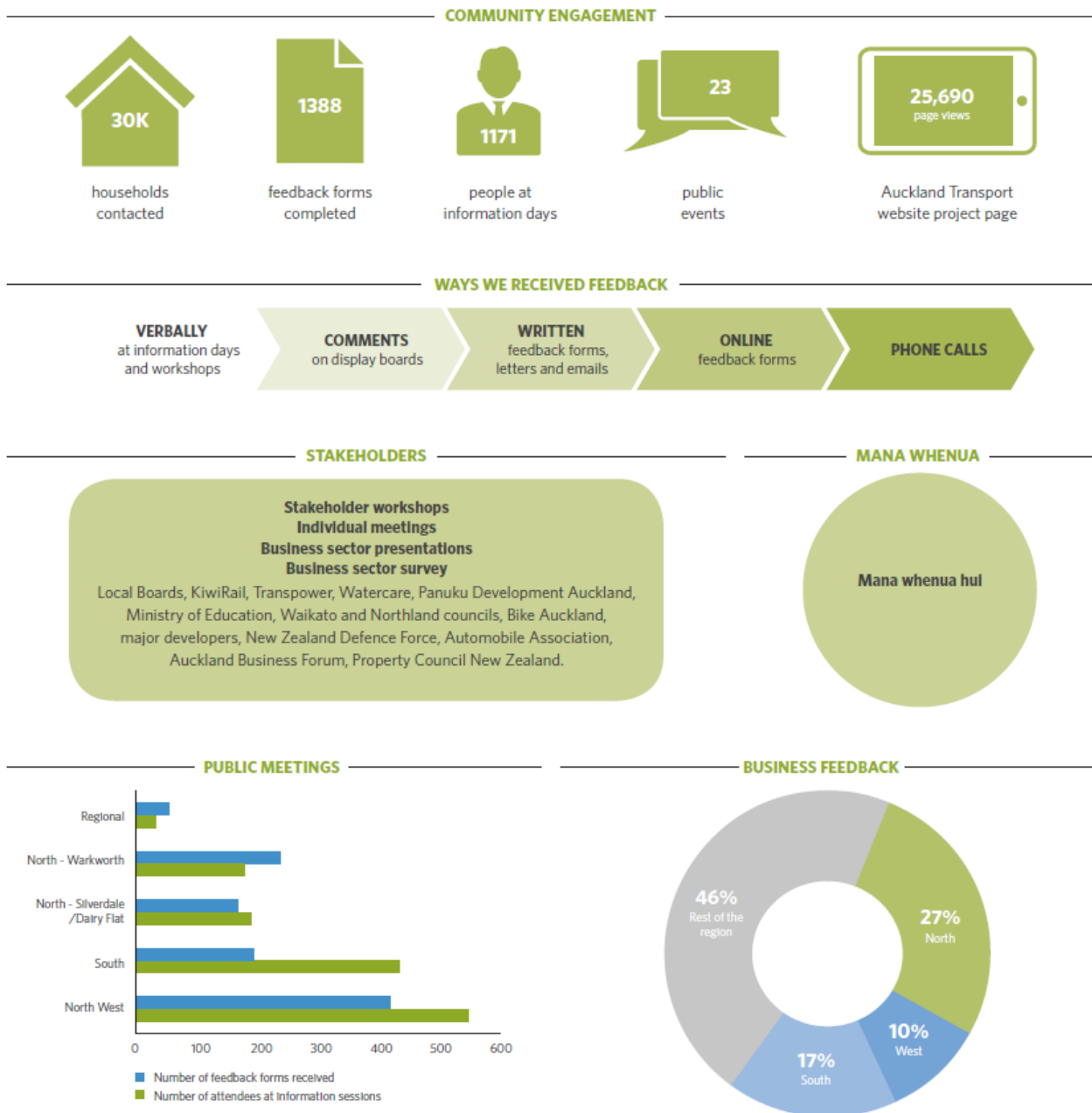


Figure 4 Summary of consultation feedback

Innovative communication tools and techniques

It was important to communicate the scale and degree of change anticipated through future growth. The project team used videos as an effective tool for conveying the transition from the existing land (predominantly rural) to urbanised areas. Videos were shown at the public Open Days, Local Board meetings, business presentations and to iwi.

As identified above, a key challenge facing the project team was that the future businesses and communities that will be in the future growth areas are not established yet. In response, the project team decided to engage with the public at a regional level rather than limiting the consultation to the specific growth areas. It was considered that future urban growth is an issue that affects the region as a whole and that all Aucklanders would be interested in providing feedback. Various forums provided links to the videos and to the online feedback forms.

Another approach to overcome this challenge was to ensure the project incorporated best practice transport and land use planning to identify the future transport networks. For example, the project included consultation with the Young Planners Committee of the New Zealand Planning Institute to gain the latest thinking and innovative ideas around transport planning and urban design principles.

To ensure that consultation focussed on the long-term rather than only the immediate or short-term, the themes and questions used in engagement asked people to think about future aspirations or to consider the network as a whole, for example:

- What transport features do you think will make this area a great place to live?
- If you had \$100 to develop the strategic transport network in the south, how would you spend it? (allocate in \$10 amounts)

Open and transparent

The project needed to be open and transparent with the public, stakeholders and iwi about the expected level of growth and around the planning process involved in identifying and developing the future transport network (as represented in Figure 2 above).

The project also needed to demonstrate that the consultation exercise would have an impact on the Programme. We have clearly articulated that the feedback has been considered and has resulted in changes to our approach. For example as a result of feedback, the Programme prioritised public transport to reflect the strong desire to see improved public transport links. Figure 5 below summarises the feedback received and how it changed the preferred network.

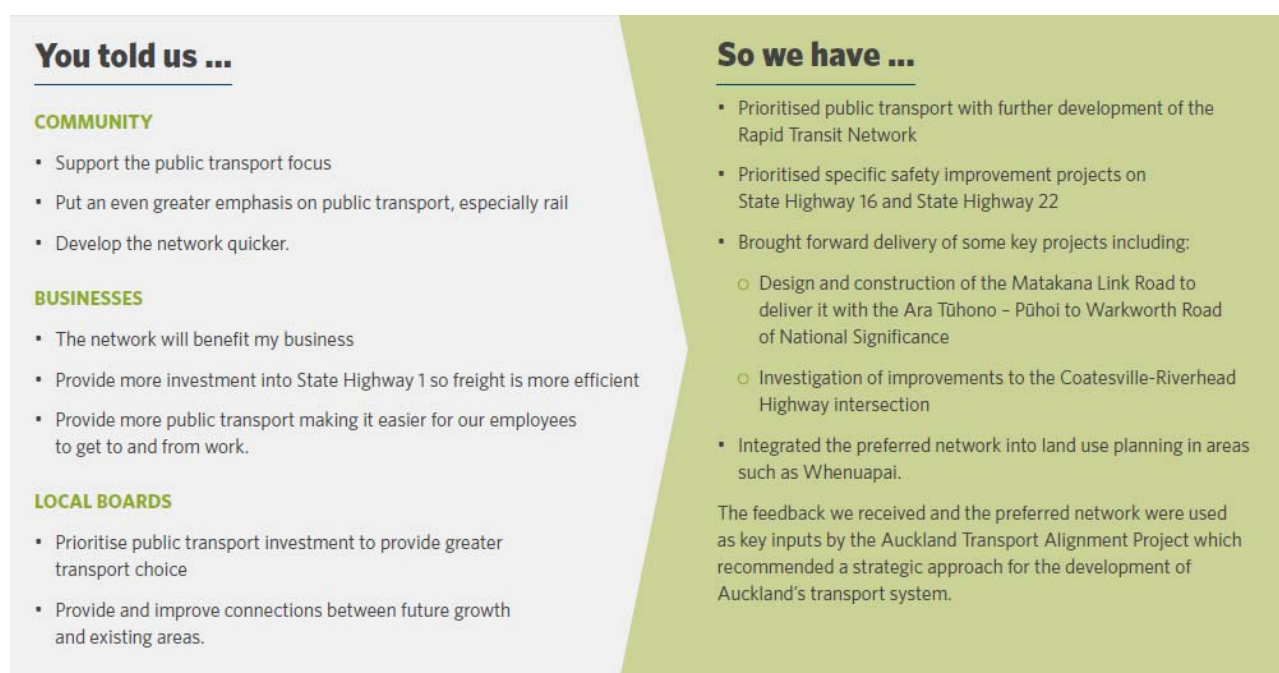


Figure 5 Summary of feedback and impact on preferred Programme

It was also communicated to stakeholders that further consultation will take place when individual projects and corridors are progressed. This messaging around ongoing consultation was an important element throughout consultation (refer to Figure 2 on the planning process).

Demonstrating a plan while encouraging open thinking

It was important to show that the three agencies have undertaken planning already to respond to growth to reassure the public and businesses that growth is not occurring without some degree of forward thinking. This helped to address one of the key challenges identified that there is a negative perception from the public regarding growth and to demonstrate that the three agencies are being proactive.

Part of this involved building on existing knowledge and planning. However, it was also essential to invite new ideas and thinking and allow for innovation. One way to achieve this was to ask a combination of yes/ no questions and open-ended questions. Another technique was asking participants to comment on proposed ideas using tokens to demonstrate voting preferences (for example see Figure 6) or to provide new ideas/ suggestions using post-it notes (for example see Figure 7).



Figure 6 Example of voter preference technique using tokens

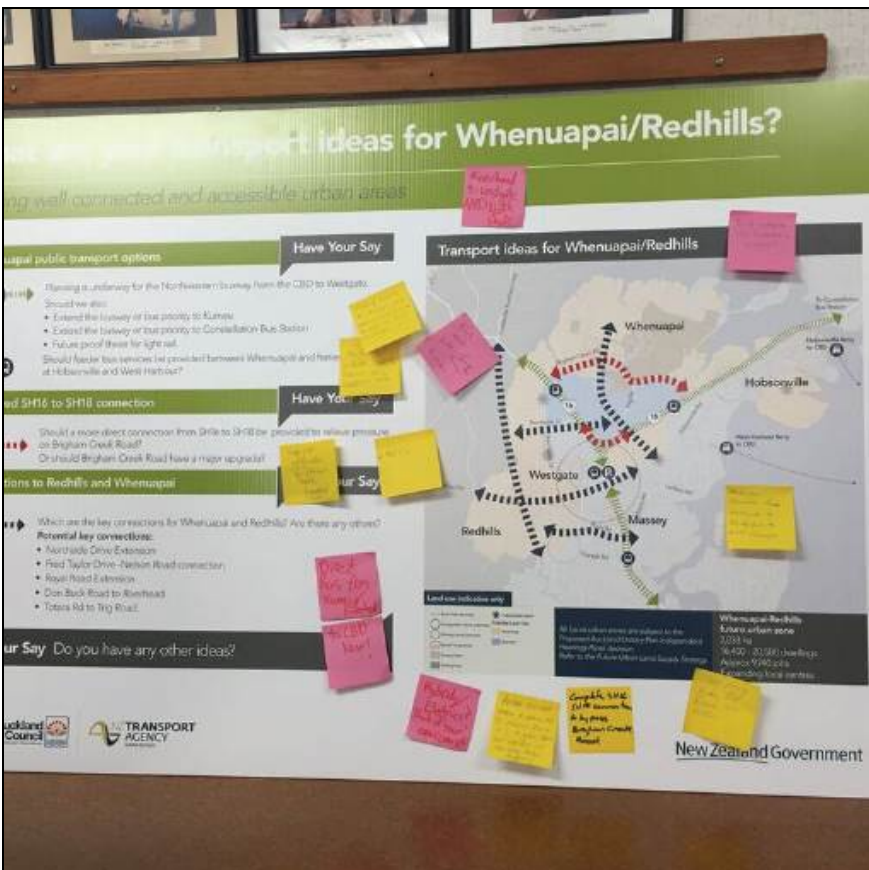


Figure 7 Example of consultation material and method used to seek feedback

CONCLUSIONS

Overall the consultation approach and themes developed addressed the key issues identified, and generated a high level of interest and participation in the consultation process from a wide range of stakeholders.

The key messages from Transport Networks for Growth Programme in developing a consultation strategy for a large-scale and complex project are to:

- Adopt a joint approach to consultation across the partner organisations – using the skills and resources across the three organisations made a large contribution in achieving a successful consultation approach in this project
- Start consultation early and be transparent about where the project fits into the planning process and the next steps
- Engage mana whenua early in the project and in the development of the iwi engagement strategy
- Employ a range of tools and forums to communicate the project to stakeholders and to gain feedback
- Consider video as a tool for communicating change
- Strike a balance between demonstrating that there is a plan while also encouraging new ideas