

Hon. Phil Twyford
Minister of Transport
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

17 December 2019

Dear Minister

Auckland rapid transit programme

We write to you to express our serious concern at the Government's approach to delivering the rapid transit programme in Auckland, which was included in the 2018 ATAP Package agreed between the Government and Auckland Council.

As a group, we have a wide variety of views and priorities when it comes to investment in the Auckland transport network. We are, however, united in the belief that Auckland desperately needs a high-quality rapid transit system, and in our doubt that the current delivery process – in particular, the lack of transparency – will lead to the best outcome for Auckland and New Zealand.

Through the early stages of this project, and particularly since the announcement of an unsolicited bid, the public and different stakeholder groups (advocacy organisations, land owners and business owners alike) have been kept in the dark. No information has been shared on the factors that have guided decision-making, or on the steps that were followed prior to settling on two preferred bidders.

Nor has there been any opportunity for the public to provide feedback and help inform the Government's approach. Assuming there is an opportunity for engagement further ahead, it now appears that it will only come towards the end of the process, after the key decisions have already been made.

All of this is a worrying departure from best-practice business case development, where – from the outset of a project – engagement with the public is recognised as a critical opportunity to incorporate the views of the community, demonstrate the robustness of decision-making, and secure buy-in.

This is a once-in-a-generation project that will impact on lives of all New Zealanders, now and in the future, and the consequences of not getting it right would be enormous.

By shutting the public out, there is a risk that this process will result in a sub-optimal solution that fails to secure broad-based, lasting support or, worse still, is rejected by the public. Our fear is that this could lead to a situation where rapid transit becomes a political 'no-go zone', and subsequent rapid transit projects that are urgently needed are held back or cancelled.

An additional concern is that a non-transparent, irregular process could expose the project to the risk of a judicial review in the future – which, again, would undermine the progress of the rapid transit programme.

We therefore urge you to immediately provide the public and stakeholders with sufficient information to understand and assess the work programme to date, and the two bids currently being evaluated. In particular, we would like to know:

- The requirements the Government is seeking from the project, in terms of outcomes
- The extent to which financing questions have been decoupled from technical questions
- How much consideration was given to other delivery options and approaches
- The extent to which the project has been considered as part of a network-wide solution, versus in isolation
- How value for money and affordability have been incorporated into the analysis

Further, once this information has been made available, we urge you to provide key stakeholders with the opportunity to give feedback prior to binding decisions being made. This should be done in conjunction with establishing a stakeholder reference group – comprised of, but not limited to, the signatories of this letter – for the remainder of this project.

We are very happy to meet with you as a group to discuss these concerns in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



Barbara Cuthbert
Chair
Bike Auckland



Brett O'Riley
Chief Executive
EMA



Matt Lowrie
Director
Greater Auckland



Bruce Kidd
Co-convenor, Auckland
Generation Zero



Mike Noon
GM Motoring Affairs
NZ Automobile Assn



Viv Beck
Chief Executive
Heart of the City



cc. Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister
Hon Grant Robertson, Minister of Finance
Hon Shane Jones, Minister of Infrastructure
Peter Mersi, Chief Executive, Ministry of Transport