

Hon Phil Twyford
Minister of Transport
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

28 February 2020

Dear Minister

Auckland rapid transit programme

In mid December we wrote to you expressing our concern at the Government's handling of the Auckland rapid transit programme, specifically the lack of transparency.

Thank you for your written reply to that letter, and for the opportunity to meet with you last week to discuss our views in more detail.

Unfortunately, the response we have received from you and your officials has done little to assuage our concerns. These can be summarised as follows:

- The public still has very little substantive information on the project, making it impossible to judge, for instance, whether the right outcomes are being sought, whether it is sufficiently integrated with the rest of the transport network, and what the cost will be
- Nor has there been any opportunity to date for public feedback. During the meeting, you confirmed that when public consultation does occur (in the months ahead, following the selection of a delivery partner), it will not extend to project outcomes and objectives – that is to say, the issue of what problem the project is seeking to address. This critical issue has therefore been discussed and decided completely behind closed doors
- This is at odds with best practice for the development and procurement of major infrastructure projects, where engagement with stakeholders is recommended from the early stages, to help refine the approach and to secure buy-in, and to reduce the risk of unanticipated community push-back further ahead, which can lead to very costly changes in project scope
- Cabinet's decision to open the door to an unsolicited bid from the NZ Infra consortium has frustrated and confused many elements of the infrastructure industry, and fuelled a perception that the Government's procurement practices do not entail a 'level playing field'

As we highlighted, the cumulative effect of this approach has been to alienate your stakeholders (advocacy organisations, industry and officials), and to generate a significant deficit in public trust and confidence before the project has even started.

At the meeting you emphasised that this project is about "laying the groundwork for a rapid transit system that can support the city for the next 100 years." The multi-generational

impacts make it all-the-more important that the approach is built on a solid foundation of public support and public investment in the outcomes.

It may well be that, as you asserted at the meeting, the low level of public visibility of the project is an inevitable consequence of Cabinet's decision to investigate the NZ Infra bid (though we would like to see more information further ahead to illustrate this).

If that is the case, we would question whether the perceived benefits of the approach justify the harm done to stakeholder support, and whether – on balance – it would not have been better to opt for a more conventional approach to procurement and delivery. This could perhaps have involved project specifications being adjusted to a slightly wider range of innovative approaches and the door opened for other suppliers to bid alongside NZ Infra.

In our view, the current situation is the result of a back-to-front approach to procurement and delivery. Rather than identifying a problem, exploring options, going to the market and then considering funding models, this approach has involved looking at the project first of all through a funding lens (a “public-public partnership”), and then working through the other elements.

To help rebuild trust and confidence, and to go some way to assuaging the concerns we have raised, we again call for a stakeholder reference group to be established for the remainder of the project. The group should be comprised of the signatories of this letter as well as other key stakeholders, and its remit should include providing feedback on fundamental project issues (like the outcomes framework), not just on more peripheral matters.

This should be done as part of a process of “constructive and meaningful engagement and information sharing with elected members and the Auckland public”, as called for by the Mayor of Auckland in his letter to you on 9 December last year.

We are happy to talk further with you and your team about how this could work.

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 Julie Anne Genter, Associate Minister of Transport
Hon Shane Jones, Minister of Infrastructure
Peter Mersi, Chief Executive, Ministry of Transport