

17.3.21 - Outline of concerns regarding the delivery of “Healthy Streets” and the cycling programme

We are concerned at the slow and often ineffectual or non-delivery by Auckland Transport of the cycleway programme and a range of “healthy streets” projects. These projects have the potential to address many key challenges Auckland faces, including but not limited to:

- encourage active transport and health benefits this brings
- reduce car dependency,
- tackle transport inequality,
- respond to a post-Covid recovery to meet the increased demand to get around locally by bike, micro mobility or on foot
- the rapid uptake of e-mobility, including e-bikes and e-scooters
- reduce deaths and serious injuries of vulnerable road users, and
- put us on a pathway to meet our agreed emissions targets.



This paper outlines what we consider to be the range of barriers that need to be broken down and our response to a number of non-delivery excuses we have heard from Auckland Transport in recent memo’s and workshops. It is also shaped by stories we have been told from local board members, cycling advocates, members of the community and our discussions with people in the industry.

Given the range of concerns we believe there needs to be a fundamental reset of cycling policy and delivery within Auckland Transport. We would like to meet the AT CEO and Board Chair with the Mayor to discuss and to agree on the next steps to put AT on track with clear political direction and support.

1. Background

The Urban Cycleways Programme was launched by the National Government in 2014 and became a \$333 million fund. In Auckland 15 projects were funded, and projects were expected to be completed by 2018.

Out of the 15 Auckland projects announced in 2015, public information suggests that 5 have been fully completed, a further 4 are expected to be completed this year, 2 have been partially completed, and 4 are on hold. The latest information supplied to us suggest that the remaining projects will only be complete by 2023, 9 years after the initial announcement and 5 years late.

The Cycling Programme Business Case was signed off by the Auckland Transport Board in August 2017. This recommended a \$635 million investment in cycling over the next decade, which would deliver on the Auckland Plan target to deliver 70% of the Auckland Cycle Network by 2030.

There has been no clear progress in the Walking and Cycling Programme since 2018, with the exception of some local business case work in several priority areas which we have very limited visibility of. Part of the budget appears to have been subsumed into the broader Connected Communities programme, again of which we have not seen clear progress in the last three years.

In terms of budget, figures supplied by Auckland Transport suggest that AT fell well behind delivery in 2018/19, underspending by \$34 million, and since then have fallen a further \$15 million behind planned spend, despite the reported cost increases.

Cycle Budget vs. Actual Spend (2018/19-2020/21)

Budget and Actuals	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Budgets (2018 RLTP)			
Urban Cycleway Programme	52,000,000	49,212,800	52,111,488
Walking and Cycling Programme		7,098,000	11,634,080
Total Budget (2018 RLTP)	52,000,000	56,310,800	63,745,568
Actuals			
			Revised Budget
Urban Cycleway Programme	17,973,751	42,097,440	51,708,234
Walking and Cycling Programme	704,318	8,036,907	3,162,512
Total Actual Spend	18,678,069	50,134,347	54,870,746

Notes: Excludes new footpaths, renewals

2. Excuses for non-delivery

We have raised the issue of non-delivery of cycling projects with Auckland Transport for some time at several meetings, workshops as well as email correspondence with senior staff. The answers we have received have been unsatisfactory and have not matched the experience we have had talking with communities, as well as our previous experience as local board members championing local projects. This section lays out the excuses we have heard from Auckland Transport, and our belief that these excuses are not relevant or have been overplayed.

Community “opposition” and there is “no demand”

There have been a few high-profile projects that have put AT in the firing line for community opposition. However, AT has often overplayed this as an issue and used it as an excuse for non-delivery. We’re confident we’ve reached a tipping point of consensus that we need to act for the well-being of our communities, emissions reductions and health outcomes.

Since 2011 there has consistently been public support for investing in cycling, people friendly streets and safety around schools.

The Great North Road improvements project, just one example of the many issues with AT’s approach, is on to the third round of consultation since 2016. This project was strongly supported in the first round but got caught up in the issues with the Surrey Cres/Garnet Rd cycleway in 2017, even though Great North Road was a completely separate project. The project has since become part of the large Connected Communities programme, which has had little visible progress despite being a flagship programme.

We recognise the tension between AT delivering “healthy streets” at pace and public consultation requirements. However, we believe that AT is over complicating processes where there is no requirement to re-consult on agreed political outcomes, plans and strategies. We want to see AT take advantage of the CCO governance structure to deliver healthy streets and not to hide behind “consultation” as an excuse not to make hard decisions. It is politicians who get voted out if we get it wrong not AT management!

Roads are too “narrow”

Many of Auckland’s main roads were built around tram routes. The problem isn’t that these routes (and the majority of roads on the Auckland cycle network) are too narrow but that AT is unwilling to reprioritise road space. One of the reasons why we have a transport CCO is so the organisation can make tough calls without political interference if it is in the best interests of all road users and to deliver agreed objectives.

At the moment AT wants it both ways leading to poor decision making. For example \$9m has been invested in the “temporary” Victoria Street cycleway that delivers a substandard level of service. There are a number of high-risk conflict areas between PT users, pedestrians, riders and drivers along the route.



AT has conceded “they wouldn’t design it like this now” but compromised the project because management would not sign off on necessary changes to the road corridor. Following a site visit (photo above), the board chair made it clear to staff that road space might have to be re-allocated and that these big calls should be brought to the AT Board rather than left with management to decide in favour of the status quo, which is the type of direction we would like to see.

3. Barriers

Rather than the excuses we identified above we believe issues with non-delivery relate more to issues of internal culture & siloed thinking that predominates. Cycling also lacks the internal profile needed across Auckland Transport, given cycling projects often challenge status quo thinking and require compromises to be made.

Lack of internal champions

Auckland Transport’s walking and cycling team was disbanded in 2018, and since that time there has been no single manager responsible for leading AT’s cycling programme. At the time the CEO said *“that active transport had become a priority for the whole organisation and a steering group, led by a member of the executive, would help ensure it stayed that way”*. However, we have seen examples time and time again that demonstrate this is not true or not working. It is not clear to us if this steering group exists, and which member of the ELT is championing cycling in the organisation. Just some recent examples of this apparent failing includes new projects reinforcing the status quo even when on the agreed cycle network, renewals failing to make improvements for walking and cycling (despite budget available from local boards) and the lack of leadership around responding quickly to lockdown, opportunities for innovating streets funding as well as identified quick wins.

We recognise that the CEO and AT Board Chair have a big task turning around an organisation that was originally focussed on optimising vehicle efficiency at the expense of all other modes, however all the signs are that there hasn't been the internal cultural and organisational change that was signalled in 2018.

There appears to be a layer of management who are able to block progressive changes and carry on "business as usual". Just some examples include:

- cycling projects not progressing (actively blocked) if to do so would impact AT's revenue stream from on street parking.
- Response to innovating streets projects such as resisting efforts to remove car parks.



We know that AT can move fast when other priorities are involved. For example, this cycleway connection on East St (connecting Lightpath to Karangahape Road) appeared in less than a week in response to safety around the CRL project development. This project required the removal of one lane of traffic and parking.

Budget

It is promising to see the commitment to walking and cycling funding in the ATAP and RLTP. We are concerned, however, that AT has not drawn down on all funding currently available from Waka Kotahi and is going to lose the remaining UCP funds for the outstanding elements of that programme. AT is also having to play catch up for years of under-delivery even when funding was available. For example, of the total 2018/18 budget over \$52m actual spend was just under \$18m.

As AT has highlighted the costs of delivery have increased especially as "cycling" projects are expected to deliver a range of streetscape upgrades. It appears AT have accepted that cycling projects now cost \$8 million per kilometre, and this is being quoted repeatedly in different contexts as reasons (another excuse) for slow progress with the available budget. While some projects such as the Karangahape Road upgrade (and others in town centres) are going to be expensive, this approach is not required on arterial roads or quiet streets. AT must work harder to deliver cycling projects at a more reasonable per kilometre cost.

These cost challenges make it even more important for AT to leverage local board budgets, innovating streets funding and other budgets such as renewals to deliver "pop up" infrastructure cheaply and quickly and fix gaps in the network.

As mentioned, we don't believe the organisation has the internal structure or willingness to do this currently.

Targets

Auckland doesn't have agreed mode shift targets that AT is working towards. There are different targets in the Auckland Plan, recommended by the Climate Change Commission and in AT's SOI.

The measure of "kilometres of new cycleway added to the regional cycleway network" in the SOI, has resulted in AT reporting every new metre of "cycling" infrastructure being delivered in Auckland regardless of funding source and location. The figures supplied for cycleways delivered in 2019/20 includes paths through parks funded 100% by Auckland Council & Local Boards, as well as cycleways delivered as part of other roading projects which generally do not aid delivery of a

connected network. Only one of the 9 cycleways delivered in 2019/20 was part of the Urban Cycleway Programme, and this was just 200m in length.

In the latest Quarterly Report AT states the Herne Bay “cycleway” will contribute 3.8km towards the 7km of cycleways AT plan to deliver this year despite the fact this project doesn’t deliver any separated infrastructure, but is purely a traffic calming project! This does not match our understanding that this target was intended to measure progress on the Urban Cycleways and Walking & Cycling Programme.

Even with this approach AT has failed to deliver the (very modest) cycleway target every year other than 15/16. To deliver their cycling programme agreed by the AT Board in 2018 15km a year needs to be delivered and we’re not even seeing 10km.

AT has lost sight of the importance of delivering a connected, safe network at speed and with urgency (to achieve the “network effect” – as presented to the AT Board in 2017). There is no one in the organisation with this vision and mandate to deliver.

We would like to see meaningful mode shift targets and updated measures in the SOI focused on “healthy streets” outcomes.

Next Steps

Arguably AT has the mandate and CCO structure to enable it to deliver “healthy streets” without further political direction. For example, clear outcomes are included in the Auckland Plan; the Parking Strategy supports prioritising key routes; and emission reduction targets and climate actions have been agreed.

However, given the range of barriers and issues that have resulted in slow and inadequate delivery to meet agreed outcomes we believe there needs to be a fundamental reset of cycling policy and delivery within Auckland Transport, which we would like to discuss further how this can be progressed.

Prepared by Councillors Bartley, Coom, Darby and Hills

Date: 17 March 2021