Two car or not two car? That is the question.... Developments in transport planning

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Background

The recent rapid (and thankfully short lived) rise in New Zealand petrol prices at the pump, was a sudden and sobering message to the community at large, that the days of "cheap" petrol, if not at an end, may nevertheless be very close to it. Some even wondered if the much discussed (and disputed) concept of "peak oil", where demand had finally exceeded maximum economic supply, had finally become reality. Reflecting worldwide price increases, the significant forecourt fuel price rises here in New Zealand created a climate where people for the first time in many decades began to seriously re–think their travel needs and choices. More telling still, it was perhaps a timely reminder of how dependant we have all unwittingly become on largely unfettered car use. Prices have now largely settled back to their prior levels, but the nagging doubt remains – could it all happen again, and when?

Arriving here in New Zealand from the UK in mid 2007 (just before the price increases) I witnessed a familiar scene of a Government anxious to raise the level of debate about domestic greenhouse emissions and the part that managing motorised transport might have in meeting the country's major climate change agenda: to halve per capita greenhouse gas emissions from transport by 2040. A very worthwhile debate, but one that grabbed the attention of much of the community far more when it was simplified at the pumps into a direct and immediate impact on daily lives.

The New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008

A draft Updated New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008 *(NZ Ministry of Transport December 2007*) contained for the first time a provisional range of transport sector targets to be achieved by 2040 by the Government in partnership with territorial and regional local authorities, business and industry and, importantly, the community.

The content was familiar to practicing transportation planners and engineers arriving here from Europe, and the UK especially. The document echoed a desire to encourage greater availability and choice in the more sustainable and "active" transport modes – namely walking, cycling and public passenger transport; whilst tackling other transport related issues such as supporting greater freight share by rail and sea (the most carbon efficient freight mode), improving road safety and importantly, emphasising the importance of integrated transport and land use planning.

Familiar territory? Well yes, as these core principles were contained in a UK Government publication of the late 1990s "A New Deal for Transport" (*UK Department for Transport)*, which set out the Government's intention to support sustainable transport provision, meet new objectives and targets by milestone years and how the Government intended to work with local authorities to meet those key aims. Was that new? Well again not really, as those approaches derived from exploring what a number of northern European nations had

already achieved in promoting (and importantly achieving) greater levels of sustainable transport choice through shifts of funding support for both infrastructure and promotion.

The New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008 (*Ministry of Transport 2008*) affirms the Government's vision for transport in 2040 (the target year for many of the

performance indices and objectives), that "*People and freight in New Zealand have access to an affordable, integrated, safe, responsive and sustainable transport system"*. The vision is further supported by five transport objectives:

- Ensuring environmental sustainability
- Assisting economic development
- Assisting safety and personal security
- Improving access and mobility
- Protecting and promoting public health

The Strategy contains a number of detailed transport targets associated with each of these objectives, against which progress is intended to be measured through to the year 2040 and via interim milestone years (many being defined in the associated Government Policy Statement on Land Transport Funding 2009/10-2018, *Ministry of Transport 2008*). Interestingly, the UK Government in rolling out its Transport Strategy nationally and in defining its funding support mechanisms for local authorities, defined four shared high level transport objectives as:

- Air quality management
- Road safety (casualty reduction)
- Congestion management
- Accessibility (for people and key land uses by public transport and active travel modes)

Again it seems clear there are more similarities than differences. It is also interesting to note that such approaches, despite the inevitable differences of emphasis, have had broad cross party support from the leading UK political groupings. It will be interesting to see if the new NZ National Government seeks to steer a different course over the coming months and years in implementing the new NZTS.

Strategies into Practice

How effective will these new approaches be? Only time will tell, but the Government is certainly following international best practice in more clearly defining than ever before what it stands for in transportation terms. Setting clear goals and targets and demonstrating a willingness to keep these under review in response to changing circumstances is also sound best practice.

So, where might you look to see how these approaches are being put into action? The Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy 2007 (*Christchurch City Council, Environment Canterbury, Transit New Zealand, Selwyn District Council, Waimakariri District Council 2007*) defines a new direction for urban development in the Greater Christchurch area, with clear visions, aims and objectives intended to better manage growth, better unite transportation and land use planning, intensify the density of future development (to help manage unnecessary growth of the urban "footprint") and deliver sustainable development in all aspects of environmental impact, including transport.

Further, Christchurch City Council has published a Draft Christchurch South West Area Plan (*Christchurch City Council 2008*), which sets out a framework for the comprehensive planning and development of the south west of Christchurch. The first delivery of some approaches set out in the Urban Development Strategy, the transportation aspects of the Plan set out to achieve a good balance between transport and land use planning. This is intended to deliver "travel demand management" (a term you will see used increasingly in transport planning circles), by *reducing* the need to travel (through good transport and land use planning), *managing* the network (to achieve best value from existing infrastructure and resources) and then *investing* in new infrastructure only where there is a proven need. Much of that investment will be in supporting the modes of cycling and walking through networks offering good access to local amenities, and in public transport services, supported by more intensified land uses within easy walking distances to those key services.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly the transportation and land use planning fields are changing significantly and rapidly. They need to. As transportation and land use professionals we have an obligation to remain a little ahead of public opinion in planning future communities. Some of the travel demand management initiatives being promoted currently are not universally popular as they seek to influence choice. However, our obligation must be to ensure sustainable transport is a genuine and accessible choice for future generations, as walking or taking the cycle perhaps may become the only viable option. That may be many generations away. It may just however be sooner than we think.

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