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Committee Policy, Finance and Strategy Committee
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LGNZ Annual Conference 2004

1. Purpose

To provide a report back on the *Local Government New Zealand Annual Conference 2004*.

2. The LGNZ Annual Conference

I attended this Conference, together with the Chair and Deputy Chair, and Jack Rikihana, representative from Ara Tahi. I found it a stimulating experience on three points:

- meeting other regional, city and district councillors
- seeing Auckland, the big metropolis – and it is scarily big, and its challenges
- being stimulated by two very interesting keynote speakers

It is a pity that I was the only ordinary councillor allowed to go.

3. Regional Tour: Metro Auckland Transit and Manakau City's Botany Downs Development

I found the pre conference regional tours well worth attending. This included viewing Britomart Rail Terminal, and travelling in Auckland's new carriages. As an ex Aucklander, I sympathise with their problem of having only half a suburban rail system, and the significant cost and time it will take to change that.

Though Wellington's Tranz Metro system is much better, and has led to higher population densities along corridors, we still have only $\frac{3}{4}$ of a rail system, with, like Auckland's old station, the service stopping at the edge of Wellington's CBD. A significant justification for rail is the increased transit generated development around the line, as has happened overseas, and the greater travel efficiency it gives.

We also visited Botany Downs, a “flatland” greenfields suburb in east Manukau City. It is touted as higher density living, with houses on small 300 sq metre sections. Literally paddocks one year and up-market residential townhouses the next. East Manukau, along with the North Shore and Central Auckland apartments, are the main areas absorbing Auckland’s 30,000 a year net increase in resident population. (Over 12 times Wellington region’s 2,500/year increase).

Manukau City claims this pattern is “more sustainable”. There were still no buildings over 4 storeys, so the population density is still low. It is very like 1960s Te Atatu, where I spent time one vacation building ticky tacky houses. But with smaller sections. Even in the 1960s, Wellington had 4-6 storey apartments. Auckland is still the 1960s Los Angeles model of urban sprawl. Probably there’s more profit in greenfields subdivision than high rise, even though it subtracts from our main foreign exchange earner, agriculture by gobbling up agricultural land. New 300 square metre sections were said to be worth \$180,000.

There were innovative features, including stream corridors left as open space between roads, rather than being stranger danger areas at the back of houses. Auckland already has what Wellington seeks in its regional development strategy – a land development plan/zoning, and a city boundary, within which development is to be managed. But it is hard to see it as sustainable. Some good opportunities for transit generated development exist though.

The return trip was by ferry, back along the Waitemata Harbour soaking up the world class seascape, and Auckland’s dress circle of Bucklands Beach, Kohimarama, Bastion Point, Mission Bay, Parnell, etc. The trip concluded with a sail under the Harbour Bridge, and through the Viaduct Basin and Westhaven marina, Auckland’s Venice of the South. That evening in the high tech Sky Tower Restaurant, we watched the sprawling metropolis turn hourly. The benefits of spreading more of Auckland’s migrants round the rest of the country are significant – both for congested Auckland, and the rest of us.

4. Regional Tour: Regional Parks

On Sunday, we visited ARC’s Waitakere Regional Park visitor centre, and marvelled at their system of 21 parks – both coastal and bush, with four more planned in the next ten years, a \$20 million annual budget, and almost ten million visitors/year. Their Parks are a major success story, making the most of the attractive coastline, and highlighting the importance of thinking and investing ahead. Then a depressing visit to Albany on the North Shore, a city centre with no centre, but lots of light industry, perhaps the industry the Hutt Valley and Porirua used to have. The only redeeming feature was that some subdivisions have ponds to catch storm run-off and silt.

5. Conference Keynote Speakers

5.1 Helen Clark, Prime Minister

A very positive speech. She values the six monthly fora with LGNZ, and LG's response to be effectively involved. Six ministers were at the Conference. The Government's water program of action was mentioned, including higher costs and standards for water treatment, and flood protection, including a recent Environment forum with regional councils on flood protection. A central/local government working group is looking at capability and resourcing issues for local government, and central government's role in lifting the capability of less well resourced councils, including funding infrastructure and community expectations.

5.2 Peter Kenyon: Healthy sustainable enterprising communities

Peter exhorted us, in an inspirational address, to encourage our communities, especially the young to learn by doing. "If you belong to no group, but join one, you halve your risk of dying in the next year." Being future oriented is invaluable, as is continuing to learn, adapt and develop social capital (paper available). We already do some of this with GW's community groups.

5.3 Moria Rayner: The day after tomorrow - sustainable local democracy in a global environment

The second inspirational address, about the importance of facing up to difficulties as a community, and overcoming conflicts of interest. Most human societies through the ages have not survived. We were told of the eruption of Mt Pele, Martinique (1902) that killed almost everyone. This happened because of conflict in getting expert advice, because of the ruling junta's desire to get re-elected two days after the eruption occurred. Also Easter Island, where a chiefly conflict of interest, because of mana, saw all their trees cut down to build stone statues. Then the community had no logs for canoes to fish, and suffered major hardship. Made one realise the need for risk averse survivable policies on oil depletion, globalisation, and climate change.

5.4 Creative places awards

These are awards jointly sponsored by LGNZ with Creative New Zealand, to recognise the ten most innovative local authority arts based initiatives last year. The innovative Wellington City did very well, gaining four awards. Overall winner was the new Gore Art Gallery for expat New Zealander John Money's collection and their own 42 Ralph Hoteres. All winners were great contributions to local communities.

5.5 Meeting other regional and local councillors

Swapping experiences and discussing issues with other Councillors was most valuable. The two break-out workshop sessions were interesting, with a wealth of choice. I also attended the Regional Sector AGM, and was impressed with the broad range of issues they dealt with. They meet quarterly and it would be

valuable to circulate their minutes to Councillors. At present we seem to be the only regional council developing wind electricity. But some councils are interested in strengthening their lines networks, to improve their communities eg Northland Regional Council.

6. Conclusion

For me the Conference, as LGNZ's main event of the year, was a stimulating experience in a number of ways. It is an experience I believe other Councillors would also find beneficial. With the current GW rules that the Chair and deputy Chair always attend, and only 1 other councillor, it will take eleven years for every councillor to attend. So most councillors will miss out. Three Councillors applied to attend this year and I was chosen by ballot. So the demand is there.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee recommend that Council:

1. *receive the report and note its contents.*
2. *approve that two regional councillors, other than the Chair and Deputy Chair, attend future LGNZ annual conferences.*
3. *approve the circulation to councillors of the minutes the Regional Affairs Committee of LGNZ and important papers, be circulated to Councillors.*

Report prepared by:

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