

# Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

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## Long-term opportunities and challenges for Aotearoa New Zealand

Briefing for the incoming Prime Minister and Government

October 2023



## Introduction

Koi Tū has worked extensively with the Auckland Policy Office, Auckland Council, CCOs and private sector and community stakeholders over the past three years on Auckland's long-term development issues. Koi Tū produced the *Reimagining Tāmaki Makaurau: harnessing the region's potential* report in 2022, which followed extensive consultation with diverse stakeholders from the community, business and the public sector.

## Key points

- Auckland represents 40 percent of Aotearoa New Zealand's GDP and 35 percent of the population.
- Home to the largest Māori population and one of the largest Polynesian populations in the world, Auckland will soon have two million residents.
- Auckland is hamstrung by contested policy making and planning between its council and central government.
- Planning needs to be less partisan and take an intergenerational approach.
- Social, cultural, educational and health amenities need better and more-coherent planning.
- Future generations of Aucklanders should be able to experience a city that is ambitious, supportive and efficient and where quality of life and of the environment meet all their needs.
- Such a city would attract international finance and entrepreneurial talent on which a more weightless economy could be built.

## Context

More than 180 years after Pākehā arrived, Auckland is New Zealand's gateway to the world. It is the country's economic and financial capital. It is the most ethnically and culturally diverse region in Aotearoa and boasts the world's largest Māori and Polynesian populations. It will soon be home to two million people, and that large and diverse human resource has great potential benefit for the entire country. It is a city with many opportunities, but not all have been invested in with strategic intent. There are many opportunities to foster the potential of Auckland's diverse people and cultures, the density of tertiary education and the size of the business community. An innovation culture is emerging that needs nurturing and stewardship.

It is more than a decade since the "supercity" was formed but it is not apparent that citizens have any greater feeling of engagement or a more unified view of the future. Indeed it may have declined. During the past decade Auckland has faced phenomenal growth in population, then a Covid-induced freeze and severe disruption to its economic and social life. While it is remarkable how officials and planners managed to cope with that rapid growth, the consequences are apparent in the infrastructure gap, persistent traffic and housing concerns and unequal access to quality education, health services and other civic amenities. Geographical realities of a narrow isthmus create constraints on some aspects of planning but the broader region has resources that should play a far greater role in enhancing the quality of life.

There are also significant challenges for Auckland in its relationship with the rest of New Zealand, including the obvious demographic, historical and cultural differences and political tensions and conflicts. All of New Zealand suffers as a result of this friction. Progress in Auckland is often undermined by clashing priorities between central and local government processes leaving the city's residents disaffected and disempowered. The prolonged lockdowns in Auckland and some of the related decisions showed a lack of understanding of the city within much of the Wellington apparatus. Such contestation and lack of intimate knowledge inevitably leads to short-term thinking. Resolving contested ownership of governance, planning and management between Auckland and Wellington and achieving alignment between the multiple players with roles in each is

essential. There is no obvious formal process for reconciliation of the needs of central government and those of a city that is distinctive in size and nature from the rest of New Zealand. Notwithstanding this statement, the lessons of Auckland have implications for the country's other major agglomerations.

We urge a greater emphasis on long-term decision-making. Actions taken now will have implications for generations to come. Whether they are about climate change, providing education services or embracing Auckland's cultural diversity, a long-term outlook is needed. Future generations must be as central to our thinking as are today's citizens.

Over the next 50 years and beyond, the aspirations of Auckland's diverse peoples need to be better met. Those who face barriers to sharing in all the region has to offer must be included. The economy will need to shift and adapt in the face of domestic and global pressures, including climate change and environmental challenges, and we must use technology smartly to promote economic growth.

These and many related issues are discussed in *Reimagining Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland: harnessing the region's potential*, Kōi Tū's 2022 report. That document was the product of 18 months of extensive consultation with civic, policy and private-sector stakeholders using formal foresight processes. It was clear that while there was consensus on what the city could become, the political and bureaucratic barriers and reliance on short-term thinking were the major obstacles to significant progress. In the 18 months since, the issues of conflicted views on infrastructure between local and central government (light rail, for example) have grown. The Auckland Anniversary weekend flooding and Cyclone Gabrielle weather events highlighted the consequences of poor risk-assessment processes (see [Risk assessment and response](#)) and deficient long-term thinking, a generic theme of this briefing.

Auckland is New Zealand's primary engine of innovation and its gateway to the world. Many things are impeding its evolution into a truly global, liveable and sustainable city that is fit for the future. In particular the region is constrained by fragmented decision-making, outdated funding processes and the absence of a joined-up vision and strategy that is agreed to by both central and local government and endorsed by its citizens. Strategic thinking and planning are not the same: the former describes the goals and desired destination; planning lays out the path we choose to reach them. While much endeavour has focused on the planning dimension, less has been done to achieve a broadly agreed vision of Auckland's future. Given the many challenges ahead – from technological change to climate change – a more coherent and widely accepted vision is needed for the city to reach its potential as a globally relevant, important Pacific centre attracting talent, investment and giving all its people an unsurpassed quality of life.

## Long lens

Many of Auckland's challenges have been debated publicly for decades. Despite the commitment and goodwill of many leaders, decision makers, private-sector actors, and NGOs, the challenges continue to be addressed in a short-term fashion. In the face of numerous intersecting technological, environmental, demographic and geopolitical transitions Auckland needs to rethink its resilience. How can it break down these planning barriers, look further ahead when investing in infrastructure and technology, leverage opportunities and make bolder moves to improve the long-term outlook for both the city and New Zealand? Its future will be shaped by decisions society makes now about how we want to interact with each other, educate ourselves, develop economically and live. Short-term decision-making can lock in unsustainable practices with bad results.

Giving Auckland's future development trajectory, a more active and aligned direction will require rethinking its structures of governance, management, planning and funding. Auckland's size, shape, needs and contributions to New Zealand justify a distinct design for its governance. Indeed in many countries a city of this size would operate under a federalised type of governance and while this is a remote possibility in New Zealand an expanded "city deal" could achieve similar outcomes.

Most critically, central and local government need a unified vision and a jointly owned long-term strategy for the city developed and maintained through a mechanism that is sufficiently stable to survive political cycles. There are a number of ways to redevelop the democratic oversight and effective management of Auckland to enhance citizen-engagement and support long-term solutions. New modes of participatory and deliberative democracy, designed for our specific cultural contexts (see [Democratic innovation](#)) can be used to flesh out a collective view of our future.

Once agreed to, the changes required to bring the preferred future to life need to be articulated. Some crucial tactical decisions must soon be made, such as the location of the port, a second harbour crossing design and the shape of mass transit for the city (there are many technologies used elsewhere that have not been well considered), before Auckland can move beyond unambitious incremental change.

A key enabler of this unified approach would be an Auckland-focused unit for data, research and planning that is accessible to all those with responsibilities for decision-making about the city whether they are agencies in Auckland or Wellington. Decisions need to be based on common goals and information and be considered by a range of groups with varied expertise and experiences. Mana whenua are critical partners in building Auckland's future and Te Tiriti o Waitangi must be woven into and underpin the deliberations. Such a holistic approach engenders citizens' trust in the vision and enhances social cohesion for co-operative action. The approach we suggest upholds the principles of the Treaty (partnership, participation and protection) and Auckland's indigenous history by weaving Māori culture and worldviews into transgenerational thinking, foresight and planning. Intergenerational thinking is at the heart of maintaining the mana of whakapapa.

Intergenerational planning would be enhanced and safeguarded by establishing an Auckland or national Commission for Future Generations that is entrusted to protect the interests of generations to come, along with new procedures that would allow effective input from emerging generations into today's decision-making. Enhancing participatory and deliberative democracy with culturally appropriate processes that improve access and transparency could allow a wider diversity of Aucklanders to engage more actively in their own future and that of their descendants.

The bold proposal to eventually turn the Auckland region into an urban national park has been seen as a very positive aspiration. This would enhance the natural and environmental assets of the region and be positive for the city's quality of life, tourism and business attraction. It may be ambitious, but if Auckland and New Zealand are to thrive it is important an aspirational multicultural and multidimensional approach is taken.

## Actions for consideration

- **Establishment of a research and planning unit for Auckland owned by both central and local government through which all decisions are analysed, deliberated and implemented. This would include development and maintenance of a sophisticated digital twin for use by both public and private sector.**
- **Review of local-government arrangements so more city-wide representation is fostered.**
- **Review of Auckland's funding arrangements to make it less dependent on property taxes to ease present fiscal constraints.**
- **Give priority to consideration of a 'city deal'.**
- **Institute regular meeting of the Mayor and senior council staff with a cross-party caucus of Auckland MPs.**
- **Establish democratic institutions and processes such as citizens' and youth assemblies to broaden participation in future planning.**

- **Resolve such core issues as mass transit, cross-harbour travel, the future of the port and the potential for a large, world-class stadium.**
- **Establish an institution such as a commission for future generations to advance the interests of future generations.**

## References

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## Key contacts



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We address critical long-term national and global challenges arising from rapid and far-reaching social, economic, technological, and environmental change.

Our name, Koi Tū, was gifted by Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei. It means ‘the sharp end of the spear’. Like our namesake, Koi Tū aims to get to the heart of longterm issues challenging our future.

**This document was developed as part of a comprehensive briefing to the incoming prime minister and government. The full document is available [informedfutures.org/briefing-to-incoming-government-2023](https://informedfutures.org/briefing-to-incoming-government-2023)**

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We engage with people and organisations focused on the long-term development of New Zealand, and on core issues where trustworthy and robust analysis can make a real difference.

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