

A step closer to Auckland transport alignment

Update on the Auckland Transport Alignment Project June 2016



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This update reports on progress in the Auckland Transport Alignment Project (ATAP) since the release of the Foundation Report in February 2016. It highlights some of the preliminary findings and conclusions from the analysis completed to date, and outlines issues the ATAP parties are considering in developing an aligned strategic approach.

The ATAP Foundation Report highlighted the opportunities and challenges arising from Auckland's growth. While growth provides opportunities to capitalise on the benefits of a larger and more diverse labour force, driving productivity and prosperity gains, it also places pressure on transport networks leading to congestion, overcrowding and delays.

The challenges vary across different parts of Auckland. The Foundation Report indicated that under current plans there will be a growing gap between areas in relation to their access to employment. Due to their distance from locations where major employment growth is expected, the western and southern parts of Auckland appear to face the greatest future transport challenges. Part of the more recent ATAP work has focused on options to address these problems.

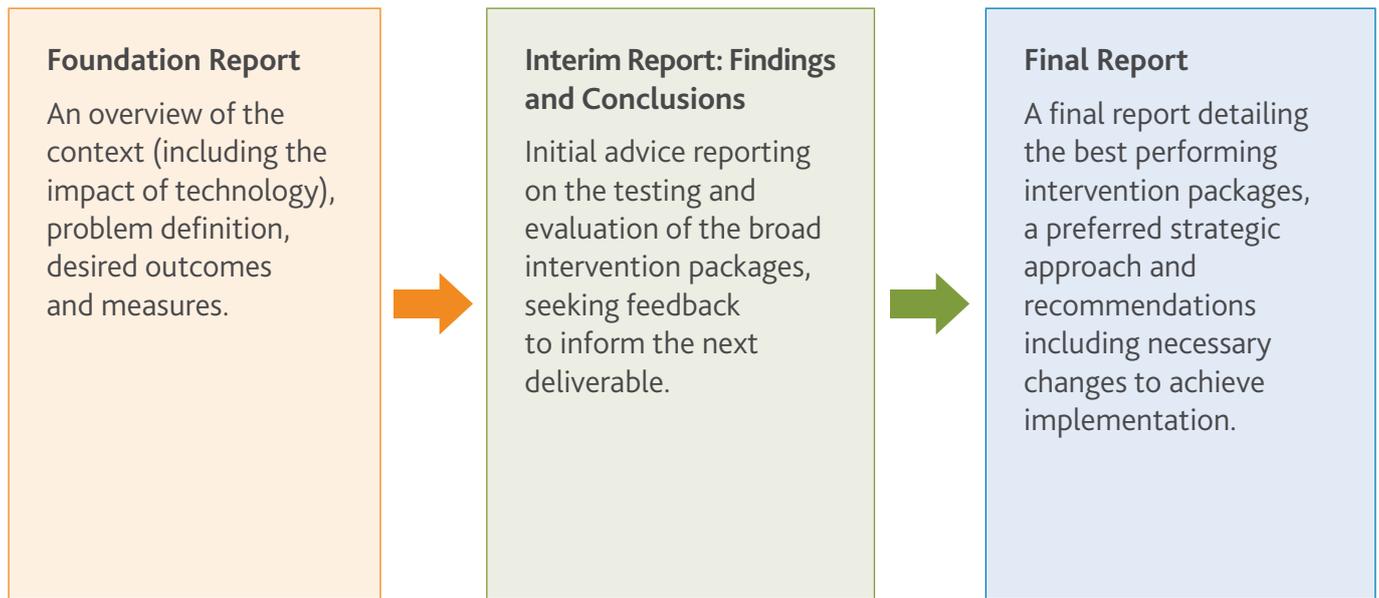


We are a step closer to agreeing a strategic approach for Auckland's transport system

ATAP has delivered an interim report to the Minister of Finance, Hon Bill English, the Minister of Transport, Hon Simon Bridges, the Mayor of Auckland, Len Brown, and Auckland Councillor, Bill Cashmore, which sets out the preliminary findings and conclusions.

The Parties are considering this initial advice.

Feedback from the Parties and further analysis will inform the final ATAP report in August.



Towards a strategic approach

Historically, our approach to dealing with Auckland's transport issues has focused on investment in roading and public transport infrastructure and services, and optimising where possible to make better use of existing assets. Over time, this approach has become increasingly expensive and has struggled to keep pace with the demands that growth is placing on the system. Our analysis shows that continuing on this path can deliver localised benefits, but will not provide the step-change in system performance that Auckland needs.

To achieve this step-change, we will need to change our approach. Based on our preliminary findings, the emerging strategic approach recommends a strong commitment to influencing travel demand patterns including pricing, with complementary technology to help shift demand. In the short term this means making the transport system "technology ready," and laying the groundwork for variable network pricing, to enable a staged implementation.

Because the benefits from these demand-side interventions may take some time to materialise, we need to ensure that progress is made on investments to improve our strategic networks. Priority should be given to investments that will be required regardless of pricing or technology changes and those that enable and support Auckland's continued growth.

Key findings to date

A key focus of ATAP is to test whether better returns from transport investment can be achieved in the medium and long-term, particularly in relation to the following objectives:

- To support economic growth and increased productivity by ensuring access to employment/labour improves relative to current levels as Auckland's population grows.
- To improve congestion results, relative to predicted levels, in particular travel time and reliability in the peak period, and to ensure congestion does not become widespread during working hours.
- To improve public transport's mode share, relative to predicted results, where it will address congestion.
- To ensure any increases in the financial costs of using the transport system deliver net benefits to users of the system.

The ATAP team has drawn from a wide range of technical analysis and information gathering to inform its findings. This includes modelling a variety of road pricing options, "what if" technology scenarios, and different mixes of transport projects. ATAP has had ongoing engagement with teams working on major infrastructure projects, received reports from specialist workstreams and has considered input from stakeholders.

Based on the analysis undertaken so far, the following key findings have emerged:

- It is possible to deliver better results by changing the mix of investments within existing funding constraints, but this is not likely to deliver a major improvement in regional outcomes over and above the current plan (the Auckland Plan Transport Network, or APTN).
- However there are differences in impact at the sub-regional level, and specific interventions can help improve accessibility in the west and south, which were identified as problem areas in the Foundation Report. For example, the Northwestern Busway appears to make a substantial difference to public transport accessibility in the west while reconfigured motorway improvements appear to improve car accessibility in the south.
- New initiatives, including variable network pricing, shared mobility and connected vehicle technology, have potentially significant positive impacts on system performance and could defer or reduce investment in infrastructure.
- We need to do more work to understand the effect of pricing on other project objectives including access and net user benefits in more depth. A network pricing system would probably need to evolve by way of a series of steps over time.
- Technology advances provide new avenues to improve congestion and could have fundamental implications for transport investment. ATAP will consider how we can capitalise on the potential benefits of technology, including understanding behavioural elements.
- The existing and pending commitments to large projects in the next 10 years, including the City Rail Link, East West Connections, Puhoi-Warkworth, and the Accelerated Motorway Package, reduce the funding available for discretionary investment up until 2028.
- Even with these investments in place, there is a projected decline in network performance by 2026. This problem could be exacerbated if, as recent trends suggest, growth is faster than the medium projection assumed in ATAP.

- As demand increases, the productivity of the existing network needs to improve. This requires a combination of better network optimisation, and a focus on Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) – such as providing real-time information to users about congestion levels on the network, and better intervening through dynamic traffic signals.
- Continued growth in public transport ridership will put pressure on key bus corridors into the central area. Efficiency improvements to the bus network (completing currently planned bus infrastructure improvements, rerouting services and fully utilising benefits of the City Rail Link project) will help to address these challenges. However, substantial further capacity increases will be required to avoid severe overcrowding in the future.
- The existing Auckland Harbour Bridge has limits on its ability to cater for heavy traffic growth, and increased private vehicle and public transport demand. A new crossing has very high opportunity costs meaning it is very important to understand key drivers, alternatives, costs and benefits before any investment decisions are made. Route protection for a new crossing needs to progress in a way that integrates further roading and public transport requirements.
- Enabling growth in newly developing areas requires early investment in route protection and land acquisition, and an early start is needed on key connections in the north-west and south, including investment to support Special Housing Area development.

Next stage of ATAP

Parties and further analysis will inform the final ATAP report in August.

This next stage of ATAP will ensure that the recommended aligned strategic approach is evidence-based, and demonstrate its costs and benefits. This further work will also involve the development of a prioritisation framework.

The final report will recommend an aligned strategic approach for the development of Auckland's transport system. It will also include recommendations on how to implement the aligned strategic approach, including consideration of further work and any changes to statutory documents.

We expect to publicly release the final report in September 2016.



Find out more:

transport.govt.nz/atap

aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/atap