

# **Sustainable Pathways 2 - Wellington Region**

## **Context Analysis Report (Working draft) – February 2010**

### **1. Introduction**

This document aims to inform the Sustainable Pathways 2 project team of the current context for the project and to give a high level summary of the policy context. The information contained below has been assembled from various strategy and discussion documents, in circulation over the preceding months.

The Wellington region comprises eight local authorities and a regional council. Until 2004 all councils were working in isolation regarding planning and development activities across the region. In 2004-2005, projections for the Wellington region revealed that certain factors relating to the ongoing prosperity and development of the region weren't looking as positive as other regions out to 2025. These were mostly in terms of a projected shortage of 25-45 year olds, regional GDP and the number of jobs weren't going to grow as strongly as many other regions, and there were going to be significant changes in the traditional manufacturing and industrial base of the region.

Since the development of the Wellington Regional Strategy in 2007, councils have been collaborating successfully on a range of issues to improve the economic performance and well-being of the region. The Strategy is a sustainable economic growth strategy and contains a range of initiatives to realise our economic potential. It also aims to enhance our "regional form" by addressing such issues as transport, housing, urban design and open spaces, which are all the things that contribute to our quality of life.

A regional economic development agency is responsible for driving the economic development projects identified in the strategy. The 'good regional form' projects are the responsibility of the councils in the region working together under the overall responsibility of the Senior Officers Resource Team (SORT). This team reports to the regional chief executives group which in turn report to the Wellington Regional Strategy Committee.

This comprehensive regional strategy and the strong reporting mechanisms that are built into it are effective but it is a voluntary strategy. However, many of the projects and goals of the Strategy are underpinned by the imperatives of the Regional Policy Statement.

### **2. Wellington Governance**

With the pending amalgamation of the Auckland region's councils, mayors in the Wellington region have begun conversations around governance of the region. The Wellington Regional Strategy provides a mechanism for the mayors and their respective council staff to work together on a unified strategy for the region. However, the councils still operate as individual councils in many respects.

Options for future governance arrangements have been canvassed by the Wellington City Council Mayor and the Chair of the Regional Council. Councils have agreed to fund further investigations of possible governance arrangements for the region.

In addition the region's chief executives are responsible for a programme exploring shared services across the region.

During the development of the Wellington Regional Strategy the potential benefits for doing a regional spatial plan were identified but not shared by all councils, so the decision was made to not progress this.

### **3. Existing planning framework**

The existing planning system within the Wellington Region is complex with the nine long term council community plans and corresponding community outcomes. A number of Resource Management Act (RMA) plans are in place including one Regional Policy Statement (RPS). There are regional plans and district plans (some with multiple parts), a number of non-statutory regional plans that seek to overcome (at least in part) current fragmented governance, and a multitude of local planning documents. The planning framework emanates largely from (although not exclusively); the Local Government Act, 2002; and the Resource Management Act, 1991.

Regional plans in place or pending are:

Regional Coastal Plan

Regional Freshwater Plan

Regional Air Quality Management Plan

Regional Soil Plan

Regional Plan for Discharges to Land

Wairarapa Coastal Strategy

Regional Landscape Atlas

The Regional Land Transport Plan

A new Natural Resources Plan is to replace many of the above plans

A new Parks Plan is currently underway.

Concurrently, there are two legislative reviews that are likely to impact on the Wellington region's planning framework. These are the:

- Resource Management review phase two (RMII)
- Local Government Act 2002 review.

The RMII follows on from the enactment of the Resource Management (Simplifying & Streamlining) Amendment Act 2009 and consists of ten related work streams. The potential impacts of RMII on the Wellington region planning framework are:

- The establishment and development of the scope, functions and structure of the proposed Environmental Protection Authority which may impact on existing unitary (regional) functions
- The management of aquaculture, infrastructure and water
- Urban planning including examining land supply and affordability issues and better coordination of urban development projects.

The likely impacts from the Local Government Act 2002 review concerning the Long Term Plan (previously long-term council community plans - LTCCP) are likely to simplify the development of these plans, in particular with regards to the community outcomes process.

#### **4. Key issues for Wellington Region.**

The region has a very strong corridor pattern, starting from the airport to the south, proceeding to the Wellington City Central Business District and then branching into a 'Y'. The two branches are the western corridor through Porirua to the Kapiti Coast, and the eastern corridor up the Hutt Valley and through the Wairarapa. Many of the region's centres are located on or close to these corridors. This form is a real strength for the region. It reinforces local centres and supports passenger transport. It reduces the costs of energy use and makes services more accessible.

However, there are two weaknesses in this overall pattern. First, there are limited east/west transport linkages, which focus freight and commuter movements along the north/south corridors. The result is increasing congestion on some major routes. Traffic congestion affects freight and commuter reliability and therefore the economy as a whole. It also affects perceptions of quality of life in the region. Second, the strong corridor pattern starts to break down in some of the flatter areas, especially the Kapiti Coast district. This reduces transport efficiency, the strength of some centres and their potential to grow as employment areas.

The unplanned and uncoordinated growth within and on the edge of the metropolitan area is reducing the benefit that such growth could generate by increasing costs and risks.

Changes in our economy are also having an effect. There has been a decline in the traditional manufacturing and industrial base in the region. A process of change in the specialised nature of manufacturing is under way.

At present we're high users of public transport which is good. We need to continue investment in this area and ensure our urban design decisions are "public transport friendly" and maximise the investments we're making into public transport.

Smart planning and targeted interventions are needed to unlock development opportunities around the region. We need to understand how our economy relates to land-use issues and have the right tools and systems in place to achieve this. We need to ensure that growth does not erode or dilute the heart and soul of our cities, towns or rural areas. We need to be clear what makes for the 'sense of place' within different parts of the region.

The region needs to identify its infrastructure needs (roads, communication, public transport etc) and ensure it has funding in place to meet those needs. We also need to ensure we can prevent regional isolation in the event of a natural disaster.

## **5. Conclusion**

The SP2 project has the potential to align with possible governance changes within the Wellington region over the next few years. This may mean the opportunity to integrate the learning from the SP2 project into more strategic planning for the Wellington region.