

Slow Train Coming: The New Zealand State Changes its Mind about Auckland Transit, 1949-1956

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Originally published in *Urban Policy and Research*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2005, pp. 37-55.

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ABSTRACT

Two recent papers have described an ‘Americanisation’ of transport policy in Auckland, New Zealand, characterised by the successful advocacy of motorways at the expense of rail. Arrested development of rail transit in Auckland presents a striking contrast to Wellington, New Zealand, where suburban rail is as well developed relative to population as in Perth (WA). Wellington’s suburban rail was installed as part of a state-led development planning programme. By the late 1940s this template was intended for extension to Christchurch and to Auckland, then undergoing rapid growth. Following a change of government in 1949 development planning ceased and a state highway fund was established to fund urban motorways instead. The principal conclusion is that state support for development planning along transit corridors may be a prerequisite for successful urban transit development.

Key Words: public transport, Auckland, development planning, state theory

I do ask you to be careful of these planners ... because if we are not careful they'll have to plan another change. They'll have to plan that the name of this fair city is changed from Auckland to Talkland. (J. Alsopp-Smith)

Some form of expanded rail service has been discussed, on and off, over the whole of [my life], and I've no doubt that a rapid rail transit system will become a reality in Auckland in my time. (R. D. Muldoon, 1921-1992)

--- Comments recorded at the Auckland Rapid Rail Symposium, 1969

Introduction

Two recent papers have described the retardation of transit development in Auckland, New Zealand's largest and fastest-growing city (Gunder, 2002; Mees and Dodson, 2002).¹ As the gracenotes above suggest, an inability to extend public transport services beyond those of fifty years ago, in a city that has meanwhile grown from 370,000 to 1.2 million, is almost a by-word of local politics. Auckland City's official centennial history records that:

In February 1969 ... the [Auckland City] Council unanimously endorsed electrification and the concept of a balanced system. But the Government holds the starting pistol—and it is obviously going to make Auckland wait and wait. Will it ever be fired?

Along with the public who are not privy to confidential negotiations, the *Herald*, a consistent advocate of rapid rail, has queried why such an obvious decision has been so hard to make. (Bush, 1971, p. 428)²

Auckland's topography is generally favourable to rapid transit development, consisting as it does of a dissected maritime setting that imposes significant transport bottlenecks. Three topographically defined edge cities shown in Figure 1 as North Shore, Waitakere and Manukau communicate almost entirely through the central isthmus. The problem of transit retardation is rendered more salient by the fact that an expansion of the kind long sought for Auckland was undertaken by the New Zealand state in Wellington between 1937 and 1955.

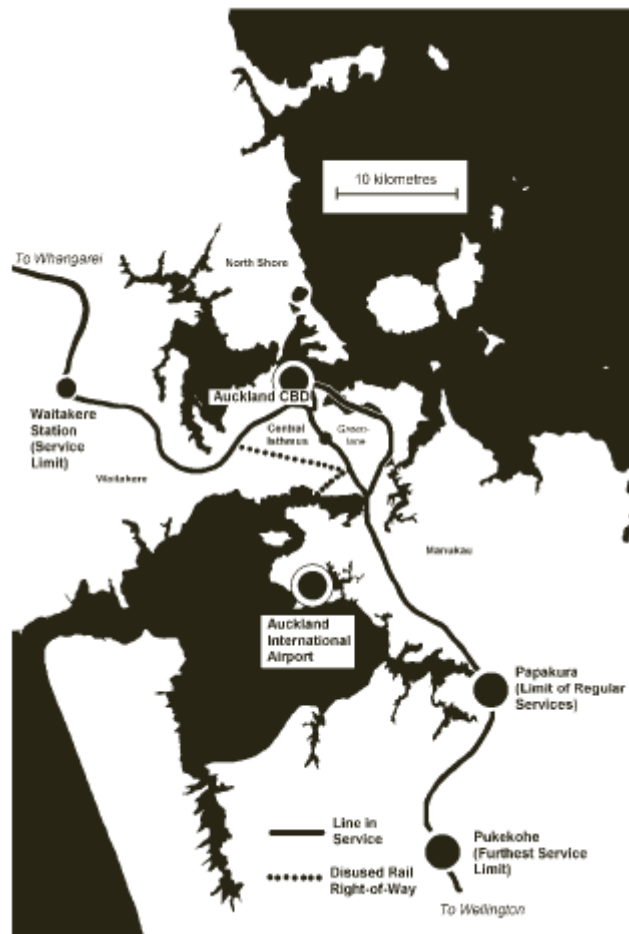


Figure 1: The Auckland Region and its Rail Corridors in 2004

Railways leading to the Wellington CBD from the north were physically realigned to improve residential access, and new town centres and housing built alongside by the state in what was largely a greenfields setting. Several kilometres of tunnel were bored through a mountain range to link the coast with the Wellington CBD by a fast route, and a new CBD railway station opened in place of the sheds that had been used up to that time (Evans, 1972b; Leitch and Stott, 1988; Dodson and Mees, 2003). The areas of Wellington served by rail have a

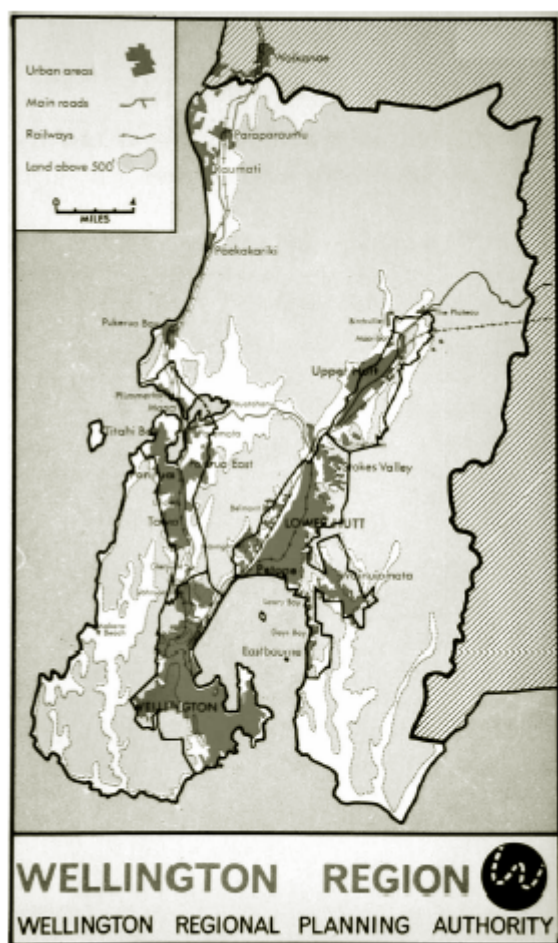


Figure 2: The Wellington Region in 1972, from Evans (1972a).
Source: Wellington Regional Council.

population of roughly 250,000 today. In those suburbs, local rail patronage currently numbers 11 million a year.³ Local bus routes loop between stations in a manner strikingly similar to North Perth (cf Newman and Kenworthy, 1999, pp. 233-237).⁴ Figure 2 shows Wellington in 1972 with rail suburbs developed along the two northern lines. Figure 3 shows a 1962 photograph of a railway town centre in suburban Wellington, planned in 1943 in what was then the latest European pedestrian-oriented style and built just after the War.⁵

The development of Wellington's railway suburbs has attracted criticism as well as praise, with a certain amount of convergence on the idea that, outside a few showcase town



Figure 3: Wellington Suburban Railway Station and Town Centre in 1962

Source: Hutt City Council

centres, it is little different from conventional suburbia (Evans, 1972b, 49-50; Schrader 1996).⁶ However, this also underscores Wellington's achievement in developing patronage and increases the parallels with Perth. By contrast, Auckland's Diesel railways deliver patronage of 2.5 million a year in a potential patronage area settled by 1.0 million people south of the Auckland Harbour Bridge. This low patronage results from a combination of service levels, lack of bus feeders, and the derelict character of many station precincts. At the same time, it has always been clear that Auckland's rail system had a very high latent patronage capacity. It can be seen from Figure 1 that there is a historic through-route to the south and northwest, plus half of an inner-suburban circle route completed in 1929, and a grassed right-of-way that would facilitate completion of the remainder of the circle route, shown dotted. There is a short disused branch route also shown dotted. As the grassed right-of-way indicates, Auckland's suburban rail system gives the impression of having had its development arrested in mid-course. This impression is historically accurate; the development

of Auckland's railways was arrested, firstly by a focus on Wellington immediately before and after World War II, and thereafter by a policy decision not to duplicate Wellington's experience in Auckland.

This paper attempts a structural explanation of the arrest of rail transit development in Auckland with a particular emphasis on the policy decision not to duplicate Wellington. In this paper, I put forward the theory that the latter resulted from a reversal of central state support for a joint policy package of urban development planning and rail transit after 1949, in favour of market liberalism. Development planning is used here to mean the design and subdivision of new towns, or urban regeneration zones, by means of public sector development agencies, that also profit from any increase in land value (Sandercock, 1975). Market liberalism is used here both in its broader sense as a political ideology ('economic rationalism')⁷ and also, in a more specific sense, the view that land is essentially a commodity to be used privately. The public sector may make broad zoning controls but not plan use or development in any detailed way. In the city, market liberalism tends to obscure at least two issues which are addressed by development planning, namely (i) 'betterment', meaning the tendency of urban land value to derive from public goods that can be accessed from the location in question rather than from the private activities that are performed upon it,⁸ and (ii) the generalisation of (i) into the idea of the city as a shared space of public goods not available in the countryside, a notion given form in Aristotle's concept of the *polis* as well as the twentieth century Swedish *folkhem*. The latter concept has its roots in concern over emigration (Musiał, 2002), and includes the idea of attracting and retaining mobile urban populations against the attractions of economies with higher money wages, by increasing the supply of amenities that can only be consumed in the city in question. Of necessity these have a generally social character and include more affordable housing and access to congestion-free public transport.⁹ Such a philosophy is highly relevant to cities in competition today

(Gregory, 2002; Frank, 2004). The analysis in this paper will be directly informed by the political-economic argument (i), but with an awareness of the wider social philosophy (ii).

More specifically, this paper identifies a triangular public policy synergy of urban development planning, betterment value capture, and rail infrastructure. The basis of this policy synergy may be described as follows. Where development planning does not occur, value capture to pay for rail may not occur; passive betterment mechanisms may collect it, but perhaps not where a railway station is programmed to go. Where value capture does not occur or cannot be applied to rail, rail cannot so readily be paid for (Fensham and Gleeson, 2003). Rail creates a reciprocal case for development planning at defined station locations, in order to maximise patronage and development gain revenues. Rail planning and development planning also mutually reinforce each other as aspects of a wider philosophy of regional structure planning. Dedicated busways with stations may substitute for rail in the above analysis, but only in so far as bus rapid transit is not confused with ordinary bus services, that have little planning impact.

In this analysis, the state—as the author of laws concerning taxation and planning, and also in practice the administrator of infrastructures—is faced with a fundamental strategic choice between a transit-oriented urban political economy featuring development planning along defined corridors, and a market liberal urban political economy that leads to transit failure and an emphasis on roads. Each of these is a package, in ways that may go some way toward explaining the archetypal cleavage between the structure-planned European city with excellent transit, and the automobile-oriented cities of America that are also described as ‘fragmented’ or ‘fractured’ (Weiher, 1991; Barnett, 1995).¹⁰ The operational aspects of planning can be devolved to metropolitan or local government, or to local metropolitan rail agencies, or both; but the state needs to maintain a supportive legislative programme in regard

to taxation and planning powers. The account that follows is in the form of a historical narrative informed by the foregoing structural hypothesis.

From the State-Developed City to Market Liberalism

Perhaps to a greater extent than in Australia, the state has played a dominant, “nation-building” role in New Zealand’s development (Easton, 1998; cf Pusey, 1991). This is an artifact of remoteness, low overall densities of population, and the foundation of all major towns, south of Auckland, by Wakefield’s New Zealand Company, either directly or in association with groups such as the ‘Canterbury pilgrims’ who founded Christchurch (Olssen, 1997). Wakefield’s philosophy of settlement in pre-planned communities loosely foreshadowed the later ‘garden city’ movement of Ebenezer Howard. Like Howard, Wakefield argued that gains from land sale at the so-called ‘sufficient price’ should be used to fund infrastructures and cultural amenity. Wakefield’s ideas would also be applied in South Australia and in parts of Canada; but New Zealand is the only country that was settled, in the main, on this principle. Land tenure would be viewed as a legitimate instrument of social engineering by the state in New Zealand for at least the remainder of the nineteenth century, and in reality for much longer (Brooking, 1996). There is an important qualification that is always made in such histories, and that is that Auckland alone developed outside the Wakefield system, on a speculative basis (Sinclair, 1980, p. 91). Auckland would subsequently develop into New Zealand’s financial capital.

The statist vision of development found its greatest expression in New Zealand under the 1935-1949 Labour government, whose programme for Wellington was described in the Introduction. However, statism was challenged from the late 1920s onward by a market liberal movement headquartered to a large degree in Auckland (Pugh, 1971, 1983; Bassett, 1994). Market liberals engineered the downfall of the Reform Party, in office from 1911 to

1928, via an internal coup d'état (Davidson, 1994, p. 48; Bassett, 1995, p. 123; Atkinson, 2003, 141-3, 150-2), following Reform's enactment of a number of allegedly socialist measures. Reform's recent actions had included a 1926 Town Planning Act that provided for a 50 per cent betterment tax (Miller, 1998) and the commissioning of the eastern rail semicircle in Auckland, linked to housing development on public lands nearby. The collapse of Reform led to an era of political turbulence dominated by infighting among conservatives, which ended with the election of Labour in 1935 and the formation of the National Party in 1936, an opposition now controlled by the free-market rebels of 1928 (Atkinson, 2003, pp. 150-2). Roughly 8 out of 25 of the founding Dominion councillors of the National Party, and its first Prime Minister Sid Holland (1949-57) would even be recruited from the New Zealand Legion, a Depression-era organisation which promoted strict limits to the role of the state, and political parties, as economic and moral panacea (Pugh, 1971).

The 1935-49 Labour administration advanced Reform's policy of state-led urban development, in the manner described in the Introduction. In 1946 Labour unveiled a ten-year plan for regional development that proposed extension of the Wellington model to Auckland and Christchurch. The plan stated that special legislation had been enacted so that land could be acquired "without the danger of paying an inflated price" for "great new settlements being built by the State, chiefly around Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch" (MOW, 1946, pp. 5,6). The plan included completion of the circular rail route on Auckland's central isthmus, plus a roughly four-kilometre long inner-city tunnel that had also been mooted since the 1920s. The Southern and Western radial corridors would cut across the major loop, facilitating transfers.

State land development programmes accounted for 45 per cent of all housing construction in New Zealand by 1940 (Davidson, 1994, p.112), and 25 per cent of housing construction in Auckland three years after the change of government (NZ Herald, 1953).

Labour was defeated in 1949 in a heavily ideological campaign (Gustafson, 1986; Ferguson, 1994, pp. 151, 174; Atkinson, 2003, p. 163; cf Sandercock, 175, pp. 106-8). A cartoon from a New Zealand building trade journal, shown here as Figure 4 indicates the issues at stake. A government officer, sitting on an urban growth boundary fence, is confining building to a state housing corridor with “Wellington Express” in the background:

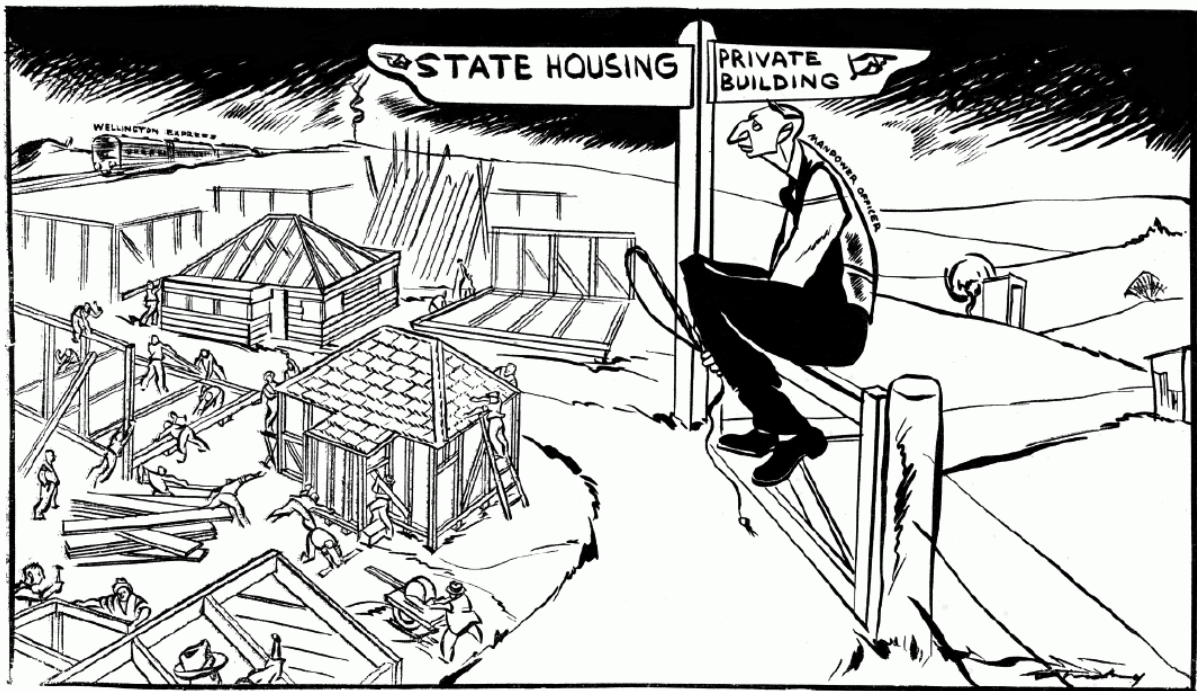


Figure 4: Cartoon from *Building Progress*, March 1944

The ideological struggle seems to have been one-sided. Davidson (1994, pp. 102-103) argues that a programmatic “recommodification” was not effectively contested by a Labour party that seemed “muddle-headed and inconsistent” by comparison. Ironically this may have been because Labour’s position, far from being ideologically socialist, was pragmatic, with the emphasis on rail perhaps merely reflecting pre-World War II levels of car ownership:

I once asked Bill Sutch—adviser to Coates and later to Walter Nash—what was the theory behind housing policy, and he said there was no theory. The government had unemployed workers, unused building materials, vacant land, and people in need of decent housing. It ensured there was the credit to bring these together. (Easton, 1997, p. 63)¹¹

Historians have argued that ideology mattered little once the 1949 election was over, that National soon turned out to be as centrist as Reform in practice (Pugh, 1983; McKinnon, 2003). Notably, National maintained Labour's policy of low-interest state mortgages for home buyers, a policy that dated back to the Reform era. The housing policies of Labour and National would in subsequent decades become almost identical, with the three per cent State Advances Corporation retail mortgage a bipartisan foundation of baby-boomer prosperity. However, this apparent policy convergence masks a shift away from development planning, the significance of which has gone largely unnoticed except by Davidson (1994), and which has not so far been linked to Auckland's transit retardation. An absence of reflection on urban problems in contemporary New Zealand has been remarked upon by several authors, notably Mayer (1962), Miller (1998) and Zöllner (1994).

A series of policy changes effectively cancelling development planning were announced in 1953. In order of logical importance, the first of these formally reduced state housing development to a residual welfare function. A new policy initiative called the Group Housing Programme was announced instead. Under Group Housing, land was to be subdivided privately with a government guarantee of purchase of land not sold by speculators after six months. Second, a new Town and Country Planning Act 1953 repealed the 1926 betterment tax. Capital gains on land have since been generally untaxed, except in the case of regular property traders declaring a profit (NZPA, 2000; Burman and White, 2003); all properties do however incur an annual property rate for local works, and subdivision is also assessed for local infrastructure contributions such as for parks and drains.¹² In 1953, the abolition of betterment seems to have been promoted as a measure to attract private capital into housing development (NZ Herald, 1954e). Third, the National Roads Act 1953 shifted taxes on vehicles and fuel from general revenue to a National Roads Fund, to be spent on roads. The

Master Transportation Plan would at several points discuss the possibility of funding motorways from the National Roads Fund (ARPA, 1956, pp. 26-8, 48-9).

In the mid-1930s Labour had begun its urban development programmes by acquiring large tracts of land at Depression-era prices (Davidson, 1994, p. 72). In the early 1950s, large tracts of land were developed outside the cities by private land development corporations given confidence to invest by the Group Housing Programme (Davidson, 1994, pp. 110-111). In the case of Auckland, motorways via a harbour causeway and the Auckland Harbour Bridge respectively gave access to parts of Waitakere, and to the whole of the North Shore, that were not served by rail. Along the southern corridor there is more parallelism of road and rail although State Highway 20 generally runs 2km to the west of the railway line and State Highway 1 two kilometres to the east (Gunder, 2002, Fig. 1). A proposed motorway parallel to the eastern rail semicircle was not built, a political outcome that has repeated itself more recently. In any case, it is likely that private sector developers in possession of large greenfield sites will prefer roads to rail, for reasons that include greater compatibility with standardised development of even density, easier funding from road tax, and lower probability of funding from land tax (Taylor, 2003).

Defusing Rail Expectations

Until mid-1954 both Labour and National maintained a formal public commitment to the Auckland rail upgrade announced in 1946. In June 1954, the Mayor of Auckland City, John H. Luxford, declared himself “quite satisfied” that rumours of cancellation had no basis (NZ Herald, 1954a, 1954b). Work proceeded as far as test borings. However, as the 1954 general election approached, the central government began to show signs of changing its mind.¹³ On 27 August the Chairman of the New Zealand Railways Commission, an entity set up to restructure rail (McKinnon, 2003), submitted a memorandum to Cabinet, with the

concurrence of the Railways Minister W. S. [Stan] Goosman, recommending that Auckland's rail upgrade be cancelled (Hodges, 1954; reproduced in ARPA, 1956, pp. 130-2). Goosman held nearly all significant infrastructural portfolios concurrently in the early 1950s including Works, Transport and, until 1953, Housing Construction. The memorandum presented the economics of the rail upgrade positively. Provided that bus-rail coordination and efficient siting of stations near Queen Street could be guaranteed, the project could not be faulted on economic grounds:

If the above conditions can be fulfilled it is considered 25,000,000 passenger journeys will accrue to rail in the early years of operation (say 1960-1964), increasing to 35,000,000 passenger journeys by 1980....Taking interest at 3½% into account the aggregate annual loss [including capital repayments] will be £353,000 in 1980 as compared with £202,000 at present [4m passengers p.a.] and £407,000 in 1960. (ARPA, 1956, p. 131).¹⁴

But the memorandum recommended cancellation all the same, on the sole ground of a lack of administrative capacity to implement bus-rail coordination (ARPA, 1956, p. 132). Yet in 1954 Auckland's trams, and the electric trolley buses that were replacing them, were operated by an entity called the Auckland Transport Board (ATB).¹⁵ A management structure for an extended ATB with heavy-rail responsibilities, and proposed geographical area of coverage (Plan No. 5), were available for perusal in Halcrow (1950).

During August and September, Goosman floated concerns about increasing subsidies (which the Commission expected to decline per passenger) and difficulties of bus-rail coordination in the media. Following one such Ministerial expression of concern, on 15 September (Auckland Star, 1954a), the *Auckland Star* editorialised that for the Government to abandon its commitment to rail "at this time, could be politically explosive and dangerous" (Auckland Star, 1954b). On 26 August, the *New Zealand Herald* had also published an article by the Chairman of the Auckland City Council Town Planning Committee K. B. Cumberland, which called for transfer of the cost of the railway upgrade to the building of motorways

(Cumberland, 1954). Cumberland was also the first Senior Lecturer in Charge of the Department of Geography at Auckland University College, later Auckland University (1946-49) and Professor of Geography at the same institution from 1949 to 1980. Cr Dove-Myer Robinson, later Auckland City's longest-serving mayor, arranged passage on 2 September 1954 of a resolution to set up a five-member special transport committee to look into the issue (ACCM, 1954, p. 261). Meetings were organised with Goosman and officials. On 20 October, the City Engineer produced a report to the special committee advising that motorways could "kill two birds with one stone," in the sense of catering for both cars and bus transit (Dickson, 1954, pp. 1111, 1116). On 21 October, the Star reported that:

If Auckland is to forget about the underground – at least for the time being – the Government is believed to be prepared to offer some financial help with an alternative – express roadways.... But the Government does not want the underground to become an election issue, on the ground that this would lead to confusion over what is essentially a technical problem. (Auckland Star, 1954c)

A Parliamentary general election was scheduled for 13 November 1954. The government seems to have been anxious to have rail removed from the campaign lest it be forced, under pressure from the Labour opposition, to reaffirm the commitment from which it was trying to resile. On 23 October, the Star editorialised that:

With the Labour Party committed to the underground it is unlikely, at election time, that the National Party would oppose it. What is to be hoped is that it will not be tempted, for reasons of political expediency, to bind itself irrevocably to it.

In this matter great responsibility rests on the City Council. If the Council were to recommend at its meeting next week that there be an immediate re-examination of the present underground project in relation to metropolitan Auckland's whole transport problem, the Government would lose nothing by agreeing. (Auckland Star, 1954d)

At its meeting on 28 October 1954, the Auckland City Council endorsed "without a dissenting voice" (Auckland Star, 1954g) the recommendation of its special transport committee that a Master Transportation Plan to decide the rail-versus-motorways issue be requested of the

Auckland Regional Planning Authority (ARPA), an appointed board known prior to the Town and Country Planning Act 1953 as the Auckland Metropolitan Planning Organisation (AMPO). Although Cumberland (1954) and Robinson had previously sought to have the Plan prepared by overseas experts, it was assigned to the technical committee of ARPA: the latter body agreed to this request on 29 October 1954. The technical committee of ARPA was headed by the Auckland City Engineer, who had not only introduced the ‘two birds with one stone’ argument on 20 October, but also co-authored a disparaging review of the Halcrow (1950) rail plan three years earlier (Dickson et al, 1951; Dickson, 1954; NZ Herald, 1951a, 1951b). The Star had predicted on 26 October that ARPA would be entrusted with the task of producing the Plan, and had added that “Government leave would almost certainly be sought for such a move” (Auckland Star, 1954e).

The Star opposed the rail upgrade and the Herald supported it, but both newspapers agreed that sending the Plan to ARPA signalled rail’s demise. The Star editorial on 1 November was headed “City Council Stops the Sale of a Pup.” The Herald’s editorial of 28 October called the proposed Plan “a curiously perverse move to postpone discussion and lift all pressure from the Minister” (NZ Herald, 1954c). On 1 November the Herald editorialised further that:

The [Auckland] city council has walked blithely into the trap prepared by the “no-men” of Wellington [in that city’s capacity as the seat of national government].... The position up to the end of last week was that the present Government had approved in principle the building of the city underground railway and the electrification of suburban lines... Now the whole affair has been shifted from the level of a State undertaking to the plane of local body politics.... [Councillors] apparently accept the city engineer as an authority on rail transport and they will accept the “master transportation plan” from a group of individuals largely preoccupied already with elaborate schemes for arterial highways. (NZ Herald, 1954d)

Behind the Council’s change of heart in 1954, in the face of a renewed anti-rail offensive by Dickson (1954), the Herald inferred manipulation of an inexperienced council by central government and, perhaps, council’s own staff. There had been substantial upheaval at the last

council election in 1953. The Herald editorial cartoon of 2 November 1954 shows the new mayor John H. Luxford tied up by an imaginary figure called “Sir Wellington Treasury” (Bush, 1971, p. 423).¹⁶ Luxford was later to state publicly that the Plan had been instigated by Goosman, via Dickson:

The decision to prepare an overall transportation plan for the metropolitan area arose out of a proposal by the Hon. W. S. Goosman, Minister of Works, that Auckland consider the advisability of giving preference to a system of express motorways into and through the city area, instead of the underground railway project, to which the Government was committed. It was during the discussions on this proposal that Mr. A. J. Dickson, the Auckland City Council Engineer, suggested that an overall Master Transportation Plan be prepared, with a view to ascertaining which proposal — express motorways or underground railway — should be given priority. (Luxford, 1956)

On the day following the Council resolution to commission the Master Transportation Plan, the New Zealand government signed a contract to build the Auckland Harbour Bridge (Auckland Star, 1954f; cf Stewart, 2002). The bridge would eventually be opened in 1959 with pedestrian and cycle access prohibited between the city proper and the North Shore, a condition that still applies today except for paying scenic tours.¹⁷ It is difficult to avoid the impression that central government assent to spending on the Bridge was contingent upon Auckland City Council sending the railway proposals off to a committee chaired by Dickson, with the fact that this had been done before the November 13 general election perhaps an added bonus.

The Master Transportation Plan was produced in 1955 and printed for large-scale public distribution in 1956. The plan recommended that a dramatic acceleration of motorway construction at the expense of rail. The Plan’s rationale was that low density of population, and the possibility of using the motorways for buses (ARPA, 1956, p. 26, pp. 42-3, p. 48), made rail both infeasible and unnecessary. However, motorway bus stations were uncoded and were never built, and Auckland City excluded inbound buses from its former tramway mall Queen Street until 1967, even though the last tram ran in 1956 (Bush, 1971, pp. 371-3).

The Master Transportation Plan tacitly replaced an earlier, multimodal *Outline Development Plan for Auckland* (AMPO, 1951) produced by the same technical committee only four years before, when it was still assumed that Auckland would develop along the same lines as Wellington. The 1951 Plan used a ‘density diagram’ approach (Mees and Dodson, 2002) to estimate Auckland’s built up area at 30,000 acres (120 square kilometres); the Master Transportation Plan divided Auckland’s population by the entire planning area of 113,000



Figure 5: Outline Development Plan Design for Greenlane
(© 1951 Institution of Transportation Engineers. Used by Permission)

acres (450 square kilometres) to arrive at a much lower density of population, which formed a significant rationale for the Master Transportation Plan’s argument that Auckland should follow American motorway practice (AMPO, 1951, pp. 20, 34; ARPA, 1956, pp. 18, 31, 77).¹⁸ This alteration has remained obscure, and the replacement tacit, because the Master Transportation Plan did not refer to the earlier plan in text or index. Nor did the Master

Transportation Plan discuss the growth in patronage on Wellington's railway system, from suburbs of similar density to Auckland's. The Outline Development Plan contained a multimodal design for the southern motorway at Greenlane and this is reproduced here as Figure 5; it stands in interesting contrast to an image from a 1958 Auckland City Council publication reproduced here as Figure 6.

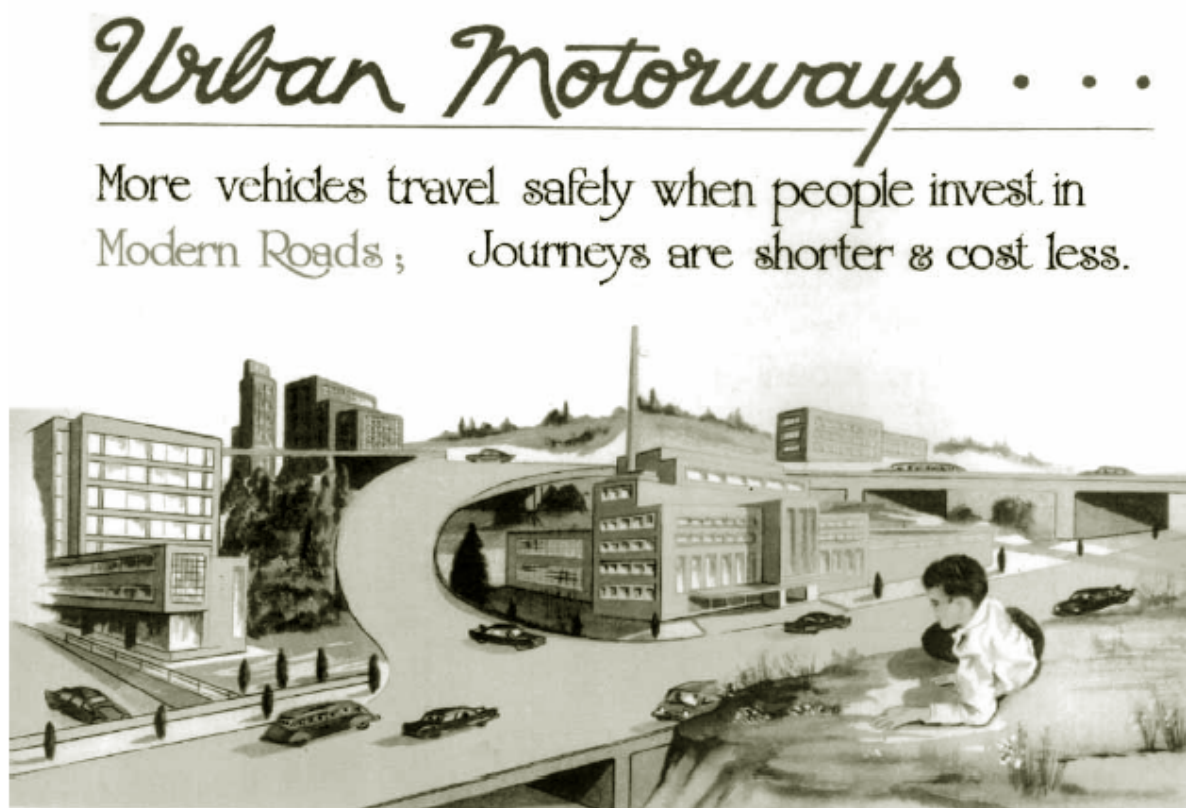


Figure 6: Motorway Graphic from Auckland City Council plan (ACC, 1958)

Source: Auckland City Council

As the *Herald* cartoon and editorials indicate, it was not really a secret that the decision to overturn rail transit had been substantively made by central government. But the fact that Auckland City had once commissioned the Master Transportation Plan would perhaps make it harder to exert a pro-transit influence on the central state in the future: "For Governments have ever since intoned: 'Auckland has made its choice'." (Bush, 1971, p. 424).

Transit in Check

The Master Transportation Plan had left open the possibility of a second look at rail at some future date when population had grown significantly (ARPA, 1956, p. 42). Official attempts were soon made to revive rail; however in the fifty years since the Plan, Auckland transit has faced interconnected difficulties of funding, and of re-legitimation of development planning. Perhaps anxious to appear reasonable, planners have been among the first to suggest that the kind of planning carried out in Wellington would, these days, be impossibly dirigiste.

Noting the use of property tax to pay for transit overseas, Auckland City Mayor D.-M. Robinson declared as a matter either of principle or Realpolitik that, nonetheless, “Auckland cannot agree to the imposition upon it of the capital charges required to revitalise the derelict suburban passenger railway service in Auckland” (Robinson, 1969. p. 5). Finance Minister R. D. Muldoon offered to fund rail’s capital establishment costs, but noted at the same time that a formula to cover even the annual operating losses at local body level had been in dispute since 1967 (Muldoon, 1969).

Partly because Auckland lacked a means to control car numbers, the quality of life in Auckland and Wellington began to diverge. As early as 1966 an international consultancy described Auckland’s CBD pedestrian environment as “unpleasant almost to the point of being uncivilised” (Buchanan *et al*, 1966, p. 10), a problem that has since become more general. Many see Wellington today as a more attractive destination (Shaw, 2003). The part played by past transit investment in securing the base for Wellington’s greater attractiveness remains relatively unappreciated however.

In the 1970s town planners and geographers advocated decentralisation of Auckland toward the south in order to reduce pressure on the central isthmus, at least part of which the New Zealand Institute of Architects had foreseen as at risk of being “crushed” by a further

increase of centripetal traffic flows as long ago as 1962 (Cumberland, 1971; Fookes, 1973, 1974; Aitken Rose, 2000; cf Gunder, 2002, p. 137). But academic advocacy of southward decentralisation along Auckland's strongest railway corridor was combined with overwhelming reservations about the idea of linking such plans to investment in rail (e.g. Cumberland, 1971; Taylor, 1969; Dart, 1969, 1974, 1976). In 1977, specific examples of transit-supportive corridor planning—Perth, then in its early stages; Copenhagen; and Washington DC—were also criticised as excessively prescriptive “grand design solution[s]” by a Director of Planning at the now-elected Auckland Regional Authority (ARA), which had replaced the appointed, advisory AMPO / ARPA from the mid-1960s (Latham, 1977, pp. 40, 41).

Motorway development continued meanwhile, although not all of the inner city links shown in Gunder (2002) Figure 1 have been built. In 2000, a highway agency newsletter argued that motorway construction benefits property values, and that the latest motorway extension would produce the same betterment as its predecessors (TNZ, 2000; Coleman, 1998). A subsequent media report indicated that these predictions had proven valid (Thompson, 2004). But as in the 1950s, neither transit nor motorways are yet funded from property value capture.

Several development planning projects are today being independently carried out by Auckland municipalities.¹⁹ However, this paper builds a strong case that such work is most useful if it can be formally coordinated with state transit. Figure 7, overleaf, shows a long-term transit system development map for Auckland, proposed in a 1999 discussion paper for ultimate realisation by the middle of the 21st century. It is conceivable that such a system could be realised more quickly, if local land development were coordinated by an agency similar to VicUrban in Victoria or Landcorp in Western Australia.²⁰ The increasingly widespread use of value capture to fund transit in the USA, and the passage of a high

percentage of transport bond ballots at the recent US elections (El Nasser, 2004), also suggest that the politics of market-liberal tax revolt may have run its course, at least with regard to transit.

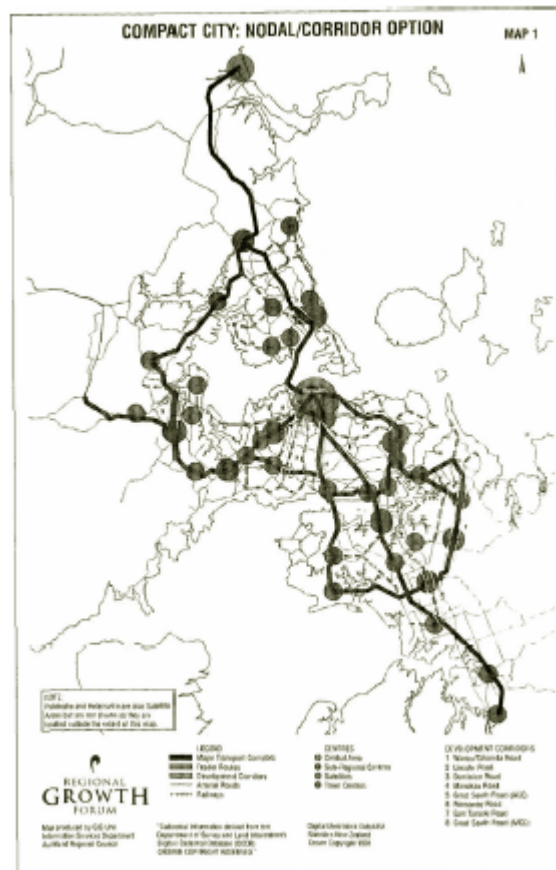


Figure 7: Potential Future Transit Corridors and Nodes of Intensification from ARC (1999).
Source: Auckland Regional Council

Conclusion: When the State Changes its Mind

The conclusion of this paper is that state support for development planning along transit corridors may be a prerequisite for successful urban transit development. In practical terms this includes the extent of state support for a triangular policy synergy of development planning, value capture, and rail infrastructure. The legs of this triangle seem mutually reinforcing for reasons first suggested, in more detail, in the Introduction. Where support for

any one leg is weak, as with academic scepticism toward rail transit in the 1970s, the other parts may fail to be deployed; in that case, development of new towns to the south of Auckland. The impact on the transit infrastructure leg of a failure of development planning, implying a loss not only of value capture but also of transit-supportive land uses and general regional structure planning momentum, is also borne out by the historical narrative including the statements of the Director of Planning in 1977.

This state-centred account is not incompatible with the view of transit failure as residing in local politics, for the state's planning and taxation agenda may reflect a collection of local, even parochial, pressures in regard to the treatment of such issues as capital gains taxation in a fast-growing city. This was indicated, for example, in the Robinson / Muldoon debate and also in the wider history of Auckland and New Zealand's market liberal reaction to statism. One could make a case for the proposition that the events following 1949 represented a direct or indirect takeover of the national urban planning agenda by Auckland elites who, in another capacity, and at different times, continued to plead with the central state for transit, provided only that it was not funded out of the profits of speculation or associated with state planning of land development.

From a research point of view the principal conclusion is clearly one that is empirically testable. In how many examples of cities with successful transit systems, has state support for development planning along transit corridors been absent? What other instrumentality has taken its place?

It was noted in the Introduction that rail can in principle be substituted by busways. However, the example of the Master Transportation Plan also very clearly points to the importance of distinguishing outcome-oriented bus rapid transit design with strong planning powers from bus advocacy that is fundamentally directed against rail, or that does not include all infrastructural costs, or that is directed against planning.

In the meantime, the challenge for cities such as Auckland and polities such as New Zealand may be to relegitimate the concept of state-facilitated urban development planning. This is arguably a part of the solution to crises not only of immediate transit fundability and effectiveness, but also, for reasons set out in the Introduction, of a more general urban crisis now widespread at the dawn of the 21st century. The wider urban crisis is caused by a combination of the automobile, rapid suburbanisation, market liberalism *contra* planning and the growing mobility of skilled workers in search of affordable housing, quality of life, and urban amenity. The example of Auckland suggests that the collapse of development planning linked to state infrastructure has produced this crisis; and that only the restoration of a comparably effective planning regime can address the crisis.

Notes

¹ When used without qualification, proper city names refer to the respective metropolitan regions in this paper. The same is true of the word 'city' when used without capitalisation. The word 'government' or 'Government' similarly refers to the New Zealand Government. The word 'transit' is used to mean public transport, except when referring to Transit New Zealand, the New Zealand state highway construction agency.

² The section of Bush (1971) that runs from pp. 419-428 is a most valuable resource.

³ The latest official statistics, reflecting recent growth in patronage on both systems from 1990s nadirs. Older statistics are available in Bachel's et al (1999) and are also cited in Dodson and Mees (2003).

⁴ See bus/rail route maps on URL: [Hhttp://www.wrc.govt.nz/rt/pickroute.cfm](http://www.wrc.govt.nz/rt/pickroute.cfm) .

⁵ Hillary Court, Naenae; Hutt City archive photograph 5013.

⁶ Schrader (1996) criticises a lack of public transport leading to housewives being stuck at home. Commuter rail service began from Naenae in 1946, but on the other hand the local buses that now loop between stations and shopping centres might well have taken much longer to establish. See also Sarnitz (2004).

⁷ Strangely enough this Australian expression seems never to be used in New Zealand.

⁸ Betterment is often narrowly associated with zoning for more intensive use; this is the formal, cadastral acknowledgement of the land's strategic location relative to the rest of the city or a nearby public infrastructure.

⁹ For instance, the architect Sven Markelius was responsible both for *folkhem* housing designs and for Stockholm's historic 1944 General Plan for transit (Davidson, 1994; Cervero, 1999).

¹⁰ The other important historical factor in the USA being race, compounding fragmentation (Weiher, 1991).

¹¹ See URL: [Hhttp://www.dnzb.govt.nz](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz) for all the figures named.

¹² A very recent Local Government Act 2002 also allows collection of contributions for more general 'network infrastructure' potentially including regional transit, although this as yet untried.

¹³ Retired *New Zealand Herald* transport reporter Graham Stewart recalls Transport Minister Goosman stating as early as July 1953, at the opening of Auckland's first section of motorway, that "My boy, the future of Auckland is with the motor car" (Stewart, 2002, p. 140).

¹⁴ This 'critical mass' argument is supported by present day differences in rail subsidy between Auckland and Wellington. Comparison is complicated by lack of a common accounting convention; but the subsidy per rail passenger seems at least two and a half times higher in Auckland than in Wellington.

¹⁵ Later replaced by Diesels.

¹⁶ The tied-up figure is "definitely" Luxford (Bush, 2004, pers. comm.). See also 'Luxford, John Hector' on [Hhttp://www.dnzb.govt.nz](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz) .

¹⁷ There is no bus- or carpool priority lane either.

¹⁸ Detailed density diagrams can be found in Cullum (1969).

¹⁹ See for instance 'Tomorrow's Manukau' on URL: [Hhttp://www.manukau.govt.nz](http://www.manukau.govt.nz)H; also, [Hhttp://www.urcs-online.co.uk](http://www.urcs-online.co.uk)H.

²⁰ URLS: [Hhttp://www.vicurban.com.au](http://www.vicurban.com.au)H; [Hhttp://www.landcorp.com.au](http://www.landcorp.com.au)H .

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