

**Backtracking Auckland:
Bureaucratic rationality and public
preferences in transport planning**

Paul Mees and Jago Dodson



Urban Research Program

**Issues Paper 5
April 2006**

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Introduction: The Transport Problem in Auckland

New Zealand's largest city is also one of the world's most car-dependent; conversely, public transport usage rates are among the lowest in the world. These trends were reflected in, and we argue caused by, one of the most extreme automobile oriented transport policies pursued by any major city between the 1950s and 1980s (Mees and Dodson 2002; see also Gunder 2002; Harris 2005).

Since the late 1990s, elected officials in Auckland have attempted to re-balance transport policies, and the ensuing documents have promised a greater role for public transport. This new rhetoric is largely due to strong public support for a new transport policy direction. But the substantive policies pursued have remained dominated by motorways despite the changed rhetoric. We argue that the attempts to reverse car dependence in Auckland have failed because the region's transport planners employ policies and processes that promote road capacity expansion over investment in other modes. This bias, which appears to be only partly deliberate, is a result of a strong pro-automobile mindset collectively held over decades by Auckland's transport planners, and in similar national mindsets that are expressed through New Zealand's institutional framework for transport planning and funding.

Auckland adds an extreme case study to recent international scholarship that has examined the extent to which institutionalised processes and mindsets can distort the articulation of public preferences in strategic transport plans. Flyvbjerg *et al.* (2006) for example have demonstrated that the apparently objective procedures of traffic forecasting are fraught with error and bias that can distort the predicted performance of various transport policy options. Flyvbjerg *et al.* (2003) have documented numerous instances of outright lying in the preparation of viability assessments for major transport projects.

Together the Flyvbjerg studies demonstrate a dominance of opaque technical approaches over open public debate. Flyvbjerg's suggested antidote to these problems is for the supplanting of 'technical reason' with 'communicative public reason'. Communicative transport planning requires more open and unbiased techniques for choosing between transport policy options, a concern heightened by contemporary concerns about the environmental sustainability of urban transport systems (Newman and Kenworthy 1999). There is a need to ensure that any policy directions or options are publicly deliberated rather than left to obscure technical analysis.

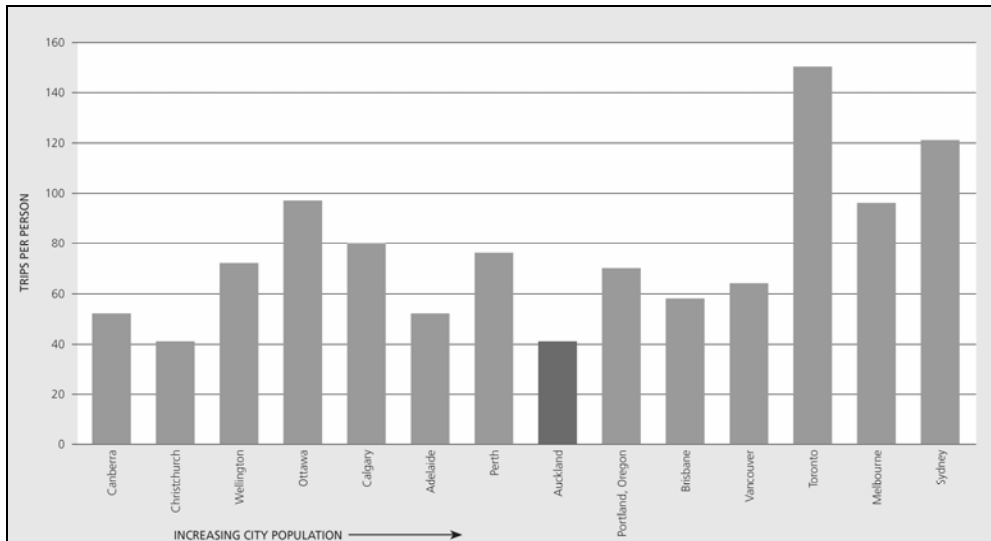
In the case of Auckland, we contend that the opposite has occurred. The recent attempts to reconfigure urban transport planning around conceptions of sustainability have simply reproduced the kind of auto-dominated transport plans that have been pursued since the 1950s, albeit with 'greener' rhetoric. This paper attempts to explain why this has occurred. Why do Auckland's regional transport planning policies perpetuate the failed road strategies of the past? Why are the region's elected representatives and its planning officials unable to translate overwhelming public support for an improved public transport system into substantive programmatic change? And do national transport planning frameworks support or hinder the achievement of sustainable transport planning in Auckland?

Arriving at Car Dependence

In the early 1950s, Auckland had levels of public transport patronage that were comparable to cities in Australia or Canada. In 1955, when the first Auckland Master Transportation Plan was prepared, 58 per cent of motorised trips in Auckland were carried by public transport compared with 42 per cent by private car. Around 290 per capita trips were undertaken by public transport, a level that compares favourably other cities during that era such as Toronto with 292 trips (Mees and Dodson 2002; Mees 2000, p. 178). Auckland's population trebled from 360,000 in 1955 to 1.1 million in 2000 but public transport use plummeted, to only 41 trips per capita.

In an earlier paper (Mees and Dodson 2002), we set out per capita rates of public transport usage in a table, which showed that Auckland's rate was lower even than Los Angeles. These figures were the subject of some comment in the media and the comparative approach has become quite popular in Auckland. In late 2005, the Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) published the following comparative table again showing Auckland as the worst performer.

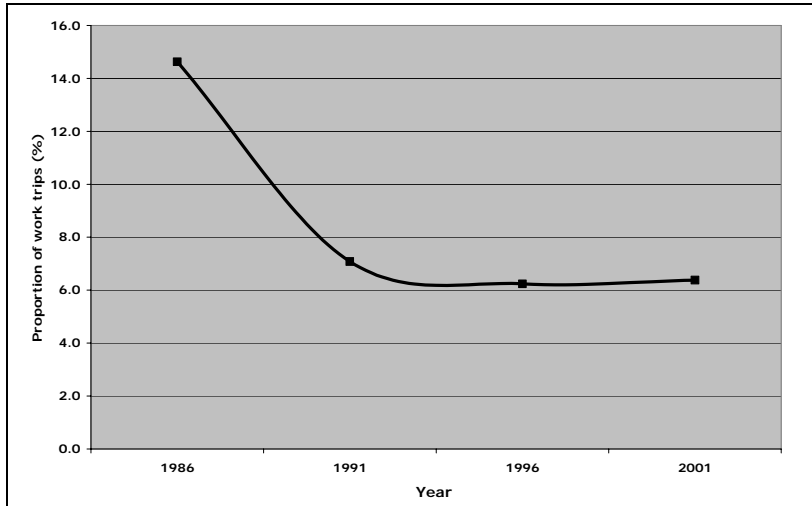
Table 1: Comparison of Passenger Transport trips per person in cities around the world (annual).



Source: ARTA (2005a, p.10)

In fact, Auckland's comparative performance is even worse than the table indicates, because the figures cited for North American cities are for 'linked' trips, in which transfers are not counted, while those for Australian and New Zealand cities are 'unlinked trips', with transfers counted separately (see Mees 2000, pp. 175-7). For example, the Vancouver figure in the table should actually be 107 trips per annum, not 62. Rail patronage in Auckland is particularly low and seems to explain much of Auckland's poor public transport performance. Public transport patronage has suffered a marked decline in recent decades (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Journey to work mode share for public transport in Auckland, 1986-1996.



(Source: Statistics New Zealand; ARC 1999¹)

Recent scholarship has been unanimous in attributing Auckland's shift towards car dependence to the transport policies pursued by the region's planning agencies since the 1950s (Gunder 2002; Harris 2005; Mees and Dodson 2002).

In the early 1950s, the New Zealand Railways proposed an upgrade of Auckland's rail system, including electrification, and underground CBD loop and integration with bus services. The region's road engineers, inspired by contemporary US planning ideals and new road building techniques, proposed an alternative plan for a network of motorways. The Auckland Regional Planning Authority, predecessor to the Auckland Regional Council, appointed a technical committee to resolve the issue. The committee's report (ARPA 1956) derisively dismissed the rail proposal as unsuited to a dispersed city and adopted the motorway plan.

Gunder (2002) and Mees and Dodson (2002) attribute the outcome change in planning emphasis primarily to regional actors – politicians and officials of the ARPA and local councils – but Harris (2005) demonstrates that central government also played an important role. What these authors also highlight is the extent to which the outcome differed from the preferences of the region's citizens, who have been more supportive of public transport. The technical preferences of the officials had prevailed over those of the public.

The 1956 report resulted in the early construction of an extensive freeway network and the neglect of public transport. This produced an earlier and more marked shift to automobile dependent urbanisation than in comparable Australian or Canadian cities. Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney, for example, did not commence large-scale freeway building until the late 1960s, and continued to invest in public transport.

¹ Figures for 1986 estimated from ARC (1999) p. 26, Fig 4.

The 1956 report had been the work of local transport planners. In 1963, American consultants were appointed to update the transport plan. While they recommended even more motorways, the consultants also revived the rail upgrading proposals rejected in 1956. Even the overseas technical experts were less dismissive of public transport than Auckland's transport officials (Mees and Dodson 2002). The rapid transit proposal was pursued in a celebrated campaign by long-serving mayor, Sir Dove Meyer Robinson, but 'Robbie's rapid transit' scheme was refused funding by the national government in the 1970s.

Robinson's campaign was undermined by the continued opposition to rapid transit of the Auckland's regional body, reiterated in successive transport strategies. In 1983, ARC planners proposed closing the rail system altogether (ARA 1983), but were defeated by public opposition. By this time the planners were, however, beginning to change their rhetoric. While earlier reports had boldly proclaimed the folly of building a rapid transit system, by the late 1980s planners claimed they were 'forced' to persist with car-based policies by a public which has a 'love affair' with the car (Mees and Dodson 2002). The technical rationality of the motorway-based urban transport now became the basis for its own perpetuation.

'Sustainability' Comes to Transport Planning

By the mid-1990s, Auckland's extensive but increasingly congested motorways and poorly-patronised residual public transport were again the focus of regional and national policy attention. The *Resource Management Act 1991* introduced 'sustainable management' as the basis for land-use planning and engendered a new appreciation of Auckland's automobile dependence among land-use planners. Strong regional population growth in the mid-1990s increased pressure on regional infrastructure and services, stimulating the region's local governments to produce a Regional Growth Strategy (Regional Growth Forum 1999) to manage land-use change in the region. The growth strategy proposed a 'transit-oriented' pattern of development, designed to combat automobile dependence.

Meanwhile, regional business interests commissioned consultants to estimate the economic costs of regional road congestion. The report produced a figure of \$755 million annually (Ernst & Young 1997) and advocated public transport improvements as a solution. However, the business lobby ignored this and demanded completion of the motorway network according to the plans of the 1950s and 1960s.

New Zealand's *Land Transport Management Act 2003* requires each regional council to regularly prepare and update a Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) to complement its growth strategy. The process for doing so has become standardised over the years, and is heavily reliant on transport modelling (Ashley, Brennan and Houghton, 1999). In our earlier paper, we discussed the RLTS of 1999, which was updated in 2003. In 1998 the ARC began drafting a Regional Land Transport Strategy to complement the 1999 land-use growth plan (under the previous *Land Transport Act 1998*).

The first stage was public consultation, which revealed strong support for improvements to public transport.² But the technical modelling process and contents of the RLTS reflected the strong road bias present since the 1950s (Mees and Dodson 2002, p.295). In the 1998 draft strategy, this orientation was reflected in the document's text:

analysis has shown that heavy investment in passenger transport is not likely to dramatically increase the overall proportion of people using passenger transport because of the dispersed nature of trips in... Auckland... Most... investment will be in roading... (ARC 1998, p. 29, 8).

The draft report was severely criticised by community groups for its pro-road bias. The planners responded in the final plan by further modifying their rhetoric:

The most significant change proposed by this strategy is an increase in passenger transport investment (ARC 1999, p. 16).

But the road and public transport projects in the final report were basically the same as those proposed in the earlier document (Mees and Dodson 2002).

Central Government Action and Inaction

A Labour national government was elected in 1999 following nine years of conservative National party rule. Labour initially appeared supportive of improvements to Auckland's public transport and funded an \$81 million buy-back of Auckland's privatised rail rights-of-way in 2002. But Labour was vulnerable to pressure from the road lobby in the lead-up to the 2002 national elections, especially after the election of John Banks as Mayor in late 2001 (see below).

Roads in New Zealand were historically financed through hypothecation of petrol excise and road user charges into a National Roads Fund, which was disbursed by the National Roads Board and its successors Transit New Zealand (1989-1996) and Transfund (1996-2002). The decisions over which projects to fund are left to un-elected officials to avoid the 'pork-barelling' of transport expenditure by politicians. This arrangement is unusual internationally, and the historical disbursement of the excise funds by road agency officials has produced a strong inbuilt incentive for further road construction. However, the cost of Auckland's 1999 RLTS motorway and public transport program exceeded petrol excise revenue. Labour responded to business and political pressure with a new funding package that provided an additional \$94 million for Auckland's roads with \$30 million for public transport, paid from increases to petrol excise (Gosche 2002).

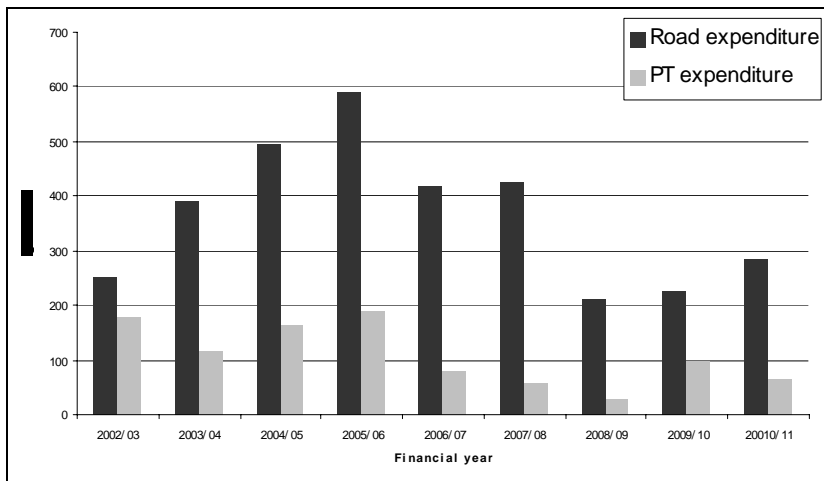
Labor was re-elected, but required support from the Greens party to govern. In exchange, the Greens demanded changes to national transport policies. Transfund was reconstituted as Land Transport New Zealand (LTNZ) and the Ministry of Transport as superior national transport policy agency was ordered to prepare a New Zealand Transport Strategy (NZTS)

² Referred to as 'passenger transport' in transport plans, with roads referred to as 'roading.' This usage appears to be unique to New Zealand.

using new sustainability criteria (Ministry of Transport 2002). But the new arrangements changed nothing, as subsequent experience in Auckland showed.

The release of the NZTS in December 2002 stimulated a review of the 1999 Auckland RLTS to bring the regional documents into alignment with the new national strategy. Since 1999 ARC officials had been costing the infrastructure projects in the RLTS. These deliberations identified a significant increase in anticipated costs, (ARC 2002) with road projects comprising accounting for the majority. Only 28.7 per cent (\$1209m) of the proposed \$4216 million 2003-2011 transport expenditure identified in the 2002 Draft RLTS was for public transport (figure 1), and the final strategy (ARC 2003) reflected the same picture.

Figure 3: Proposed expenditure on Auckland road and public transport projects 2002-2011



Source: ARC (2002, estimated from Figure 10.1, p.131)

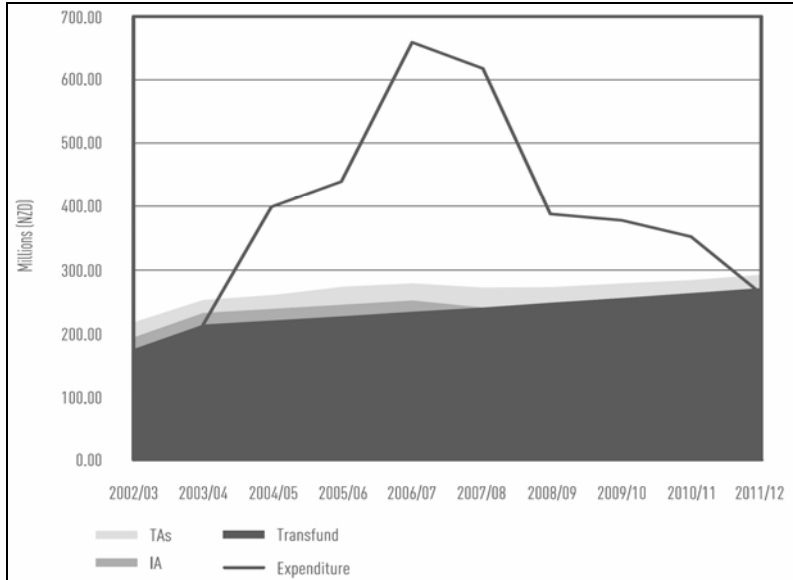
Again, road projects received the overwhelming majority of proposed funds. But the question of how to finance these projects remained as projected revenue from petrol excise was insufficient (Figure 2). Proposals for private funding were floated, but did not prove promising. There was increasing local pressure on the national government, largely from a well-funded business lobby, for investment in motorways. In the absence of demonstrable public opposition to ‘roads before rail’ central government was under substantial pressure to respond.

In 2003 the national government established a ‘Joint Officials Group’ (JOG) comprised of central, regional and local government officials to develop a funding plan for Auckland transport that would achieve ‘network completion’ within ten years. The majority of the agencies involved in the JOG were from central government. Only the ARC and Auckland City Council represented Auckland in the JOG process. Hence the JOG was dominated by un-elected officials from central government, while only one of Auckland’s seven local governments, who arguably had a greater regional mandate, was represented.

The group was instructed to base the plan on the 2003 RLTS, thus including public transport projects along with roads, but the JOG concluded that:

Increased levels of travel demand management non-pricing and public transport are essential ... but are not the solution on their own... An acceleration in road construction above currently programmed activity is needed (Joint Officials Group 2003, p. 3).

Figure 4: Shortfall between forecast and desired RLTS funding, 2003-2011.



Source: ARC (2003, p.97)

The JOG process thus became a means of accelerating road construction over public transport improvements. The JOG report also included recommendations that road pricing be adopted in Auckland, reflecting the pre-occupations of central government officials with such transport policy mechanisms (see Minister of Transport 1997; Ministry of Transport 2006) The introduction of road pricing was viewed as justifying faster road construction:

Acceleration of the roading programme will promote community acceptance of new funding mechanisms... (Joint Officials Group 2003, p. 33)

In late-2003, the national government announced a further Auckland transport funding package titled *Investing for Growth* to achieve the ‘network completion’ plan proposed by the JOG. The package provided Auckland with an extra \$1.62 billion during 2005-2015 above projected disbursements of the National Land Transport Fund, through increases to petrol excise and road user charges and thus confirmed the accelerated road program. *Investing for Growth* also established a new regional transport agency – the Auckland Regional Transport Authority (ARTA) – via the *Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004*.

ARTA’s role is to provide public transport services and infrastructure as well as local roads. The Minister for Local government claimed that the creation of ARTA would produce a new level of accountability:

I believe that Aucklanders will be relieved that central government is helping sort out the baffling lines of responsibility and accountability for Auckland transport which have hampered progress to date (Carter 2003).

But has the real problem in Auckland been bureaucratic complexity, or has it been bureaucratic resistance to transport policy changes desired by the public? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the response to the dramatic expression of a desire for transport change expressed by Aucklanders in the 2004 local government elections.

The Rise and Fall of the Eastern Motorway

John Banks, a former national government Minister and populist Auckland radio host, was elected Mayor of Auckland in 2001, on a platform of relieving Auckland's road 'gridlock'. A pro-road council was elected along with the Mayor, and advocated the completion of the Auckland motorway network. The cornerstone of this campaign was the Eastern Motorway, a project from the 1999 RLTS routed through Auckland's affluent inner-eastern suburbs. Estimated costs of the Eastern Motorway expanded rapidly between 2002 and 2004, from \$495 million (Orsman 2002a) to \$2.9 billion (Beston 2003), before being scaled back to \$1.2 billion (Dearnaley 2004a). Mayor Banks' schemes drew substantial support from business lobbyists, including the 'Roads Before Rail' Trust which advocated against regional rail improvements in favour of motorways (Orsman 2002b), as well as the *New Zealand Herald* newspaper which argued that the 'absolute need' for the Eastern Motorway required its immediate construction (New Zealand Herald 2004a).

The Eastern Motorway plan generated local opposition in the form of the Stop the Eastern Motorway (STEM) group, which drew substantial support from the affluent population of the inner eastern suburbs. STEM promoted improved public transport, including an upgrading of the rail system, as an alternative to the motorway. Mayor Banks staked his re-election in 2004 on public support for the Eastern Motorway plans and described opponents as "small in number and centred mainly on a few selfish, vested-interest property owners" (quoted in New Zealand Herald 2004a). STEM subsequently endorsed anti-motorway candidates³ in the 2004 Auckland City Council election.

The 2004 local government elections in Auckland thus provided a rare opportunity to test public preferences for transport alternatives in the face of substantial political, media and official promotion of motorways over alternative travel modes. Opinion polls taken prior to the 2004 election suggested strong regional public support for investment in public transport projects over new motorways. A poll commissioned by STEM from an independent agency indicated 64 per cent of respondents supported improved rail while only 25 per cent supported a motorway (Orsman 2004). An Auckland-wide poll undertaken by the New Zealand Herald shortly before the 2004 election found even greater public opposition to motorways than the STEM poll: 77 per cent of the electorate considered transport the most pressing problem, but only 22 per cent supported more roads while 67 per cent supported more public transport (Dearnaley 2004b). The New Zealand Herald however cautioned politicians against supporting the public view:

To provide the public transport network that most residents say they desire would cost much more than the same residents might be willing or able to finance. There are votes to

³ STEM's candidates campaigned as the 'Action Hobson' group in the Council elections in reference to Hobson's Bay through which the Eastern Motorway would have passed.

be lost in the long run by imposing a vastly greater burden on ratepayers for an amenity that might not after all entice many Aucklanders to give up the convenience, privacy, enjoyment and independence of the personal car.
(New Zealand Herald 2004b)

The election results emphatically validated the opinion polls: Mayor Banks was defeated and the election of anti-motorway candidates gave the Auckland City Council its first centre-left majority for 70 years. A centre-left, pro-public transport grouping also gained a majority on the Auckland Regional Council (New Zealand Herald 2004c). Interviewed the following day, the outgoing Mayor attributed his defeat to public opposition to the Eastern Motorway. Auckland, it seemed, had experienced a 'freeway revolt' of the type found in other Australian and North American cities during the 1960s and 1970s (Hall 1996).

Even the *New Zealand Herald* reluctantly conceded that the polls and elections had seen the expression of clear public preferences for public transport investment over motorways and that the region's transport officials should take note:

It is the elected body that can express a public mandate and those appointed to subsidiary bodies will take note of it. The leftist faction on the council are avowed believers in public transport solutions to Auckland's traffic congestion, some of them to the extent of opposition to further roading. That cannot be ignored by the most practical of appointees to the transport authority. (New Zealand Herald 2004c).

The 2004 elections came at an opportune time for those seeking transport change. The ARC had commenced work on a new regional transport strategy designed to respond to the establishment of ARTA earlier in 2004 and to incorporate the *Investing in Growth* program. Given the impressive public mandate for transport policy change arising from the elections, it might have been expected that the 2005 RLTS would represent a new direction, but this turned out not to be so. The process by which the 2005 strategy emerged is therefore worth examining in some detail, because it reveals just how deeply the bias in favour of motorways and against effective public transport is embedded in the thinking of Auckland's transport planners and political leaders. The RLTS process also illustrates how planning processes that are dominated by technical rationality can obscure and frustrate clearly expressed public preferences determined through processes of communicative rationality.

The 2005 RLTS: Consultation About Nothing?

Auckland is now one of the most dispersed cities in the world. The individual has been freed from absolute dependence on the tramways and the railways with their fixed routes... The pattern of travel has become more diffuse... after the USA, New Zealand has the highest ratio of motor vehicles to population...
(ARPA 1956, pp. 5, 31)

The region has developed as a relatively low density, decentralised region. Travel in the region is characterised by large numbers of dispersed journeys. The region's dispersed land uses and trip making have been enabled to a large extent by car ownership, which is one of the highest in the world... Cars will remain the most predominate [sic] travel mode... Cars give most Aucklanders a wide choice of living and work locations...
(ARC 2005b, p. 45).

For ordinary Aucklanders, the first indication that a new strategy was in the offing came in the form of a consultation brochure released by the regional council in June 2005, introducing the Draft 2005 RLTS. The brochure is well-designed and printed, and sets out six possible options for the future of transport in the region, one of which (no. 5) is described as the “preferred way forward.” The six options are presented as spending packages (e.g. “Option 5: spending on public transport increases to \$3750 million allowing significant improvements to bus and ferry services as well as rail improvements”) together with statements about their impacts (e.g. “as a result: significantly increased public transport use and choice”). Although expenditure levels are specified, very little information is given about what the money will be spent on, what the outcomes will be or what the assumptions used for assessing the outcomes were.

Despite the high production values, the brochure is completely worthless as an exercise in public consultation: no citizen of Auckland could possibly know what she or he was ‘voting for’ by choosing any of the options. The justification offered in the brochure for this mystifying approach is legislative changes that accompanied the establishment of ARTA. Section 36 of the *Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004*, stated that henceforth the ARC’s RLTS must not “include reference to activities or their prioritisation” or “include any regional passenger [i.e. public] transport plan.”. What was this strangely-worded legislation supposed to mean? Here is the Delphic answer given by the politician responsible for the final drafting of section 36, the co-leader of the New Zealand Greens:

There has been a lot of confusion about what this actually means, and some people criticised the bill as introduced for not allowing the regional land transport committee to get its teeth into any issues at all. That was never the intention, but I am glad that the wording has been clarified... so that it is now clear that the regional land transport strategy can and should look at modes and prioritise those. It should look at corridors and the needs on the corridors, but it should be more of a structure plan than a wish list of activities (Jeanette Fitzimons MP, New Zealand Parliament, in Committee, 30th June 2004).

But the RLTS process did not allow the public to prioritise modes at all; rather, the technical expression of the RLTS projects presented the public with a ‘choice’ between completely incomprehensible ‘options.’ Members of the committee told us that ARC officials advised them that the legislation required such an approach, but this advice was clearly incorrect. The fact that more precision was permitted is eloquently attested by the very specific ‘Future Strategic Road Network’ shown in the draft and final RLTS reports (ARC 2005b, p. 80; map 7.2), but not referred to at all in the brochure. Here we find the full list of motorways from previous plans, including the second harbour crossing and the Eastern Motorway. By contrast, even in the final RLTS, public transport gets merely an ‘Indicative Rapid Transit Network’, much of which is shown with the even vaguer designation ‘Future Potential... System’ (ARC 2005b, p. 91; map 7.4).

So rather than the community being explicitly permitted to ‘prioritise’ between, say, the Eastern Motorway and a rail rapid transit system of the kind proposed since the 1940s, the ARC incorporated the Eastern Motorway into the final report without the public having been a chance to vote *against* it, and omitted the rail option without allowing the public to vote *for* it. Given the emphatic October 2004 election results discussed above, it is clear that the ARC’s approach produced precisely the opposite outcome to that which would have

occurred had the RLTS been produced in a way that allowed the public to expressly make its preferences known.

Constraining Choice in the 2005 RLTS

The relentless technical bias in favour of motorways and the almost comically artificial nature of the process is underlined by the fact that ARC staff did develop quite specific road and public transport proposals in order to cost the various options and model their effects. Details were not shared with the public, but can be found in the unpublished RLTS Technical Papers.

All six of the options involved spending more money on roads than on public transport: even the 'high public transport' options (5 and 6) involved spending twice as much on roads as on transit. Only a further 'extreme public transport option', which was developed and tested privately, involved spending comparable amounts on roads and public transport (Technical Paper 24, p. 4; table 4). The idea of spending *more* on public transport than roads – bipartisan policy in cities such as Perth, Vancouver and Portland – was so radical that it could not be evaluated even as an unpublished "extreme" scenario!

Strangely, the *High Quality Rail Rapid Transit Option for Auckland* (ARTA 2005b) developed for the ARC in 2003 (i.e. before preparation of the 2005 RLTS commenced), and publicly endorsed by ARTA in August 2005 (three months before the final 2005 RLTS was released) was not included among any of the six options. Even the unreleased 'extreme public transport option' featured a less extensive rail network, and lower service frequencies, than ARTA's rapid transit proposal (ARC, 2005d #47, p. 3, c.f. ARTA 2005a, p. 17 [network]; and ARTA 2005b, p. 45 [frequencies]).

Additional pro-road bias is embodied in the technical 'criteria and measures' chosen to evaluate the six options (set out in Technical Paper 3). Although 24 separate criteria were nominated, covering issues ranging from the economy to the environment, the criteria at the head of the list (esp. nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) directly or indirectly emphasised the speed of travel and the number of lanes on major motorways. Emphasising motor vehicle speed (as opposed to time spent travelling) and using a travel demand model that did not allow for 'induced demand' created by motorway expansion (see discussion below) guaranteed that the more motorways included in an option, the better its performance would be (and vice-versa). This approach effectively prevented the modelling of scenarios in which slower speeds were compensated for by shorter journeys and/or transfers to public transport.

Modelling Bias

The final source of bias comes from the technical transport planning model used in the study, which is described in Ashley, Brennand and Houghton (1999). The ARC's transport planning model has been criticised in the media because its database is out of date (e.g. Rudman (2005)), but the more serious problem is biases built into the structure of the model that cannot be fixed simply with new surveys.

One feature of the ARC's model is a 'fixed trip matrix', which essentially amounts to an assumption that travel between different parts of Auckland is determined solely by demographic factors such as population and employment levels, and is not influenced either by traffic congestion or by provision of additional infrastructure. Thus, the model 'assumes' (and therefore 'predicts') that congestion will not reduce the number or length of trips, and that building or extending high-speed motorways will not encourage people to travel further. These assumptions have not been accepted by transport experts for more than a decade (e.g. Luk and Chung (1997)) and result in the model being biased in favour of motorways.

Not only is the ARC's model biased in favour of motorways, it is also biased against rail, due to the large 'transfer penalties' incorporated in the 'mode split' part of the model. This basically involves an assumption that people are extremely hostile to transferring from buses to trains to complete their journey, and would prefer to travel all the way by bus. Since in Auckland, as in other medium-density cities, buses have to be used to feed passengers to rail, the model's bias causes it to 'predict' that none of the rail improvements evaluated would significantly improve public transport usage. Even the 'extreme' scenario performed 'surprisingly poorly' (ARC 2005d, p. 5).

Significantly, given the extent to which current plans for rail in Auckland are based on experience in Perth, this modelling replicates the modelling errors made by Perth transport officials in 1988 that 'proved' the proposed Northern Suburbs rail line would be a failure. We now know that the modelling was based on false assumptions, because the officials' advice was rejected and the line was in fact constructed and carried many more passengers than anticipated. The Western Australian government commissioned a review of the modelling which concluded that:

many assumptions of [the] model... are in direct conflict with extensive experiences in similar cities... These assumptions heavily distort the calculations...
(Newman *et al.* 1988, pp.16-7).

The Perth review argued that real-world experience demonstrated that passengers' resistance to transferring could be largely overcome by well-designed interchanges, integrated rail-bus timetables and free transfers. The Northern Suburbs line was built in accordance with these recommendations (Newman 1992; see also Newman 1999, p. 233-237), and currently carries around 14 million passengers a year, some four times the patronage of Auckland's entire rail system. The Perth case demonstrates the success of a policy process in which public communicative rationality prevailed over a biased technical rationality that could not perceive potential transport options beyond the limits of its own assumptions. When tested through a genuine public process, the technical reality of the transport model was found to be false.

Privatisation: The Policy Failure that Dare Not Speak its Name

The success of Perth's Northern Suburbs transit system was largely due to integration of services and fares to form a 'seamless' rail-bus system. This was only possible because trains

and buses were run by a single public agency, a factor that has been ignored in current transport planning discussions in Auckland.

One important influence on public transport patronage in Auckland has been the privatisation of bus and ferry services. Modelled on the Thatcher government's failed deregulation of UK urban bus services outside London, privatisation was introduced across New Zealand in 1989 and enthusiastically adopted in Auckland. Privatisation appears to have been by far the most significant determinant of patronage and mode shares, as can be seen from a graph in the RLTS report showing trends for the journey to work over the five-year intercensal periods between 1981 and 2001 (ARC 2005b, p.28;fig. 3.5). Over three of the four periods there was a modest increase in the number of Aucklanders using public transport to travel to work, but the remaining period was very different.

Between 1986 and 1991, the number of public transport users fell by more than half – from 55,000 to 25,000 – and mode share declined from 15% to 7%. This decline bottomed out in the mid-1990s, and passenger levels began to recover in line with regional population growth (ARTA 2005d, p.18; fig. 2). This patronage decline is one of the most dramatic declines in public transport usage ever recorded anywhere in the world, and cannot be attributed to 'usual suspect' factors like density, dispersed employment and car ownership, because these hardly changed between 1986 and 1991. What did change substantially was the quality and popularity of bus services, which carried the vast majority of public transport passengers before and since 1989. Service levels and vehicle standards declined following privatisation, integration disappeared and the system became less legible, comprehensible and reliable. Bus boardings declined from approximately 42 million in 1990 to approximately 31 million in 1994, a decline of approximately 26 per cent (ARTA 2005d, p.18; fig. 2).

Although publicly-funded service enhancements from the mid-1990s have recovered some patronage, this represents only a small share of what was lost. Indeed, even if the mode share increases projected in the LTS and the ARTA's rail proposal were achieved, this would still leave the absolute level of public transport usage for work trips lower than before privatisation, with mode share at around two-thirds of the 1986 level. Auckland took until 2003 to regain its 1990 patronage (ARTA 2005d, p.18; fig. 2) suggesting a direct link between privatisation and the accelerating road congestion experienced during this period.

It is therefore surprising that privatisation is not mentioned at all in the LTS report, or in any of the background documents, and that the discussion focuses instead on factors such as land use that are clearly less important. The experience in Auckland after 1989 echoes the failure of urban public transport privatisations in the UK and Melbourne (Mees 2005), and confirms that only 'public' systems can compete successfully with the car (Mees 2000). But just as the ARC's transport planners seem unable to envisage alternatives to current and long-standing policies on road-building and road funding, so they also appear unable or unwilling to consider alternatives to the factor that has contributed most to the current weakness of public transport.

The sober accountants and businessmen who comprise the board of ARTA are a little more willing to face facts. In a policy statement release in the same month as the RLTS, ARTA

notes that privatisation is preventing a coordinated, affordable upgrade of bus services and presents a surprisingly frank account of the way the system is exploited by private operators:

Once registered, ARTA cannot terminate a commercial service. However at any time an operator can choose to terminate or de-register services. This leaves ARTA having to either pay a subsidy to ensure the service continues or abandon the service. The latter option is particularly difficult if the services are well established and carry substantial passenger numbers. Under existing legislation a passenger transport operator can register services as commercial to avoid them being contracted to another operator. They can then de-register these on the basis that circumstances have changed and a subsidy is needed after all. Ultimately ARTA and its funders carry much of the commercial risk on commercial services without any control. (ARTA 2005a, pp. 11-12).

However, such is the dominance of the paradigm of privatisation that the most ARTA apparently argues for is reform of the contracting system to move it from the failed UK model to the failed Melbourne model (ARTA 2005a, p. 26; cf. Mees 2005). The idea of genuine public planning and control, the norm for successful public transport systems in Perth, North America and Europe is apparently too radical to be considered.

The Public is Still to Blame

Just as their predecessors in the 1950s and 1970s had succeeded in heading off public pressure for investment in rail rapid transit at the expense of motorways, the ARC staff responsible for the 2005 strategy (in many cases the same people behind the 2003 and 1999 strategies) managed to produce an outcome that was the opposite of that clearly expressed by the public at the elections of 2004. But somehow the transport planners remain convinced that it is the public, not themselves, who need to change. The ARC's 2005 draft RLTS consultation brochure states:

[T]ransport improvements alone will not be enough. We all need to think about our individual lifestyle and travel behaviour – are we willing to change? Working from home or car sharing would help. So would walking and cycling for local trips, and using buses and trains more.

The 2005 RLTS process also demonstrates the extent to which the regional Councillors appear to have been strongly influenced by their bureaucrats and by the overall flaws in the policy process. The case of ARC Transport Committee Chair is a case in point. The chair had previously been strongly in favour of public transport improvements before further road construction:

The painful truth is that Auckland's roads will remain congested for the foreseeable future, whether the roading network is completed or not. We cannot build our way out of congestion... .Before building more roads, at least some of Auckland's public transport corridors need to be designed to carry much greater capacity.
(Cayford 2004)

But in announcing the 2005 RLTS that will dramatically expand the region's motorway network while leaving public transport improvements uncertain, the Chair argued:

[T]he Regional Land Transport Strategy strikes the right balance and should deliver a transport system the region wants. There is consensus from the region on the direction of the RLTS. It is their strategy and they have called for this balance between public transport and roading. (ARTA 2005c)

Conclusions: No Off-Ramp?

If we do what we've always done, we'll get what we've always got: more congested roads and motorways and worsening public and environmental health (ARC 2005a, p. 3).

The majority of investment will continue to be on roading (ARC 2005c, p.4).

During the preparation of and since the 2005 RLTS was released the major transport projects that have begun or have reached the advanced planning stages in Auckland are all motorways: the Victoria Park Tunnel, the State Highway 20 extension and the Upper Harbour Motorway extension. Some initial gains for public transport have occurred. In December 2005 the national government agreed to fund modest improvements to Auckland's rail tracks, including double tracking of the Western Line, a short branch track to Manukau city centre and various signalling and junction upgrades (Cullen 2005). The serious rail upgrade proposed by ARTA, including electrification and the CBD tunnel, remained as far away as ever.

As recently as February 2006, ARTA reduced the scale of even these public transport improvements due to funding shortfalls:

To stay within available funding the ARC is proposing to consult on an incremental upgrade of rail services along with delays to planned increases in bus and rail services... ...at this stage the gap is at least \$700m and quite possibly a lot more... an incremental rail upgrade is not the option that either the ARC or ARTA believes the region deserves and needs in the long-term. (ARTA 2006)

Basic projects such as integrated ticketing and electrification remain uncertain due to this shortfall, which the ARC seeks to meet via ongoing regional rates increases (ARC 2006). The possibility of delaying some of the expensive road projects and shifting the projected funds into public transport improvements remains impossibly radical in Auckland. There seems no possibility of backtracking along the historic path of unbalanced car-dependent transport planning.

After fifty years of transport planning in which the construction of motorways has repeatedly and consistently been favoured over alternative modes Auckland is now among the world's most car-dependent cities. Yet the region's politicians and planners are continuing to do what they have always done – building roads and subordinating public transport and other alternatives. The basic policy direction has not changed since the 1950s, but the rhetoric has shifted in recent years to emphasise sustainability and the promise of new investment in alternative modes such as public transport. The methods of promulgation have also changed: in the 1950s pro-road decisions were made by overt political decision, now the tactic is to wrap the rhetoric of sustainability around an opaque and biased set of

technical and financial processes and to articulate these through large and complex planning documents.

The most notable aspect of Auckland's current situation is that there have been repeated and emphatic expressions of public preferences in transport planning that have been ignored by regional officials and representatives. The 'instrumental rationality' operating within the technical processes of strategy formulation obscures the 'communicative rationality' expressed in public support for alternatives to ongoing road construction in transport policy. Even a 'freeway revolt' has been unable to produce a shift in strategic priorities in Auckland.

Central government must share some responsibility here. There is no national agency that is responsible for the planning of public transport within New Zealand's cities, yet there is a single agency for motorway planning – Transit New Zealand – that has substantial organisational capacity to advocate for new road construction. Hence while the roads agency has direct access to the Minister of Transport, there is no such avenue of access for public transport advocacy. Such institutional lines of communication can be critical in enabling contestable advice and policy making in transport.

The decisions of Land Transport New Zealand in disbursing petrol excise for transport purposes also deserve revisiting. In 2002 the government, partly at the behest of the Green Party, altered the assessment criteria for road projects to provide greater scrutiny of their environmental and social impacts, but so far no motorway has been rejected by LTNZ on the new sustainability criteria.

The inability of central, regional and local government transport planners to deviate from their historical model of pro-road planning suggests the need for a new model for Auckland's transport planning, one in which public preferences are able to be clearly expressed and articulated through planning processes rather than obscured and ignored.

The Auckland case provides an insight into the broader international understanding of how transport planning decisions are made. This study of the incapacity of the broader transport planning system in Auckland to respond effectively to historic biases adds to the growing literature on the connections between technical rationality and communicative rationality in planning. The problem of permitting opaque technical decisions, which are inevitably also suffused with political implications, to determine public investment in critical and expensive infrastructure has been well documented (Flyvbjerg 2003). The Auckland case demonstrates that the selection of strategic options can be as afflicted by this problem as choices over major infrastructure projects.

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