
Chair's report - 21 October 2024

File No.:

Te take mō te pūrongo

Purpose of the report

1. To provide the background and context for endorsing the Chair's report from the 21 October 2024 meeting.

Whakarāpopototanga matua

Executive summary

2. As part of a strengthened communication process, a Chair's report summarising key discussion points and recommendations from the 21 October 2024 City Centre Advisory Panel meeting was shared with the Mayor's Office, members of the Policy and Planning Committee, the Waitemātā Local Board, the Auckland Policy Office, and the Joint Executive City Centre Steering Committee.
3. The attached Chair's report is presented for noting.

Horopaki

Context

4. The City Centre Advisory Panel is composed of approximately 20 representatives from key sectors and industries, appointed by the Mayor at the beginning of each council term.
5. The panel's purpose, as outlined in its Terms of Reference, is to:
 - Provide expert advice: Leverage sector, industry, and lived experience to support the council group in shaping strategic direction and priorities, ensuring the city centre evolves as a thriving, vibrant hub for all.
 - Offer civic leadership: Champion the city centre, advocating for its present and future potential, and supporting the case for necessary change.
 - Advocate for best value: Represent the interests of City Centre Targeted Ratepayers, ensuring optimal value from targeted rate investments.
6. To strengthen communication between the panel and key council decision-makers, the Chair signalled at the 26 August 2024 meeting an intention to submit a Chair's memo to the relevant council committee following each panel meeting.
7. Following the 21 October 2024 Panel meeting, a Chair's memo was submitted to key stakeholders, including:
 - The Mayor's Office
 - Chair and Councillors of the Policy and Planning Committee
 - Waitemātā Local Board Chair and Members
 - Head of the Auckland Policy Office
 - Chair and Members of the Joint Executive City Centre Steering Committee
8. This report, which captures key discussion points and recommendations from the 21 October 2024 Panel meeting, is now presented for noting.

Ngā koringa ā-muri Next steps

9. The panel formally notes the Chairs report from the 21 October 2024 meeting.
10. A Chair's report will be produced after each meeting.

Ngā tūtohunga Recommendation/s

That the City Centre Advisory Panel:

- a) note the Chair's report from the 21 October 2024 meeting.

Ngā tāpirihanga Attachments

11. Attachment 1: Chair's report from the 21 October 2024 meeting.

Ngā kaihaina Signatories

Author	Simon Oddie – Priority Location Director – City Centre
Authoriser	Simon Oddie – Lead Officer

21 October 2024

To: Policy and Planning Committee

CC: Mayors Office; City Centre Executive Steering Committee; Head of Auckland Policy Office

Auckland Council

135 Albert Street

AUCKLAND

Dear Chair Richard Hills and members of the Policy and Planning Committee,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee for receiving this Chair's memo as a record of the discussion of the most important issues from our most recent meeting on 21 October 2024.

City centre data and insights

The Advisory Panel discussed the latest city centre metrics from the July-August 2024 period. Positive trends in safety metrics are welcomed and testament to the work and investment that has gone into this space. These improvements go a long way to helping the perceptions of the city centre, contributing to a more inviting atmosphere.

However, economic indicators reflect the challenging winter period, influenced by a nationwide recession affecting businesses across New Zealand, not just in the city centre. When compared with the same period last year, the data highlights the significant positive impact of last winter's FIFA Women's World Cup compared with this year, underscoring the importance of attracting more major events to Auckland and the city centre.

Negative perceptions about access remain a significant barrier to people visiting the city centre. It is crucial to dispel the idea that the city centre is difficult to reach. The panel strongly urges Auckland Transport and the council group to prioritise addressing both real and perceived access challenges. This includes providing clear information to drivers on parking options and routes into the city, as well as highlighting the many public transport services available. Enhanced wayfinding systems are also needed to make navigating the city centre more intuitive and welcoming for all visitors.

Visitor attraction and promotion

The panel held a productive discussion on visitor attraction and promotional activities in the city centre, expressing optimism about the current focus and mix of initiatives being implemented collaboratively by the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the council group. While forward accommodation bookings are looking positive, the panel noted a concerning decline in cruise visits this year and for the coming year.

A primary concern raised was the impending lack of major events funding beyond June 2025. The panel views funding for major events as essential, given their proven economic, cultural, and social benefits, which significantly contribute to Auckland's vibrancy and appeal. Without sufficient funding, the city risks losing its competitive edge, particularly as Australian cities continue to invest heavily in this area.

The panel is particularly concerned about the potential strain this funding gap may place on the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR). The CCTR, funded by city centre businesses and residents, should not be required to cover initiatives that would typically fall under regional or national funding.

The panel strongly advocates for the council and central government to expedite the introduction of alternative funding solutions, such as a bed tax or visitor levy, to enable the resumption of major event funding from FY26 onwards.

The lack of certainty around future funding has already begun to impact the event pipeline, creating an unsustainable situation. If a bed tax or similar alternative cannot be implemented soon, the panel urges the council to identify other solutions to ensure funding for major events is available in FY26, safeguarding the economic and cultural vitality of Auckland's city centre, while a permanent funding solution is identified.

City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR)

The panel received the CCTR accountability report, which highlighted the progress made possible through the targeted rate which is paid only by city centre ratepayers. The panel appreciates seeing the tangible outcomes this funding has enabled, reflecting the commitment of city centre stakeholders to enhance the area.

The panel raised several questions about the allocation of CCTR funds, particularly whether initiatives should have been funded by general rates or other sources. Since the CCTR is a specific pool of funding provided by city centre businesses and residents, there is a need for greater clarity on the role of the targeted rate as part of the overall council group funding of the city centre.

The panel supports the process of developing advice over the remainder of its current term on the potential extension of the funded CCTR programme beyond its current end date. Importantly, any extension should clearly define the CCTR's role alongside other funding sources. The panel looks forward to providing guidance on future priorities for the city centre, ensuring these are appropriately reflected in any proposed extension of the CCTR programme.

Panel priorities

The panel had an in-depth discussion on progress against its priorities, areas of focus for the remainder of its term, and feedback on direction from the Mayor and Councillors for the Annual Plan.

Through this discussion, panel members emphasised the need for the council's political leadership to adopt a strong, ambitious vision for Auckland and the city centre. The panel believes that for Auckland to excel, it must set high goals and aim to exceed them.

While the panel remains optimistic about the long-term potential of the city centre, it recognises that medium to long-term opportunities are currently overshadowed by immediate challenges facing city centre communities. Balancing a positive vision with action on pressing needs is essential.

Residential community

Growing the residential population is a critical long-term goal, and the panel believes progress on this front should be faster. The city centre currently lacks a cohesive sense of community, which the panel considers a priority for the council group if it is to grow the population here. The panel acknowledges the important work recently started to empower the City Centre Residents Group as a stronger and more equitable voice for residents. Leveraging partnerships to drive progress across multiple areas is seen as an effective approach. In addition to work in this area, the panel is looking forward to an update at its next meeting on baseline data and recommended initiatives to advance this priority.

Community and visitor safety

The panel is encouraged by visible improvements in city centre safety due to a coordinated approach between central government, local initiatives, and an increased police presence. The panel commends the council's role in unifying multiple parties in this integrated approach. While progress is evident, continued efforts are needed to ensure that public perceptions align with reality. The panel is keen to review funding settings supporting community wellbeing outcomes in early 2025 to reaffirm anticipated investment in this space.

Enhancing vibrancy and experience

Progress has been made in promoting vibrancy through increased investment in promotional activities, local events and activations, yet future funding constraints for major events threaten this progress. The panel sees significant opportunity in maintaining a robust events calendar and promoting the cultural identity of the city centre as a unique selling point.

The panel advocates for alternative funding to be used to support regional tourism and major events, which are essential for city centre growth, noting that the targeted rate's focus in this area should be on initiatives that provide direct value to city centre businesses and residents.

Additional attention is needed for cleaning, maintenance, and essential amenities, such as public toilets, to improve the visitor experience.

Integrated transport networks

The panel expressed frustration with the pace of progress on transport network integration, especially as accessibility is crucial to addressing here and now challenges as well as maximising the success of the City Rail Link (CRL). Planning for traffic circulation is essential for improving access and informing future capital investment. In the lead-up to the CRL's opening in 2026, clarity is needed on how transport systems will operate, including a loading and servicing plan for businesses. The panel appreciates new wayfinding efforts and urges swift resolution of operational issues, such as loading and servicing, Authorised Vehicle Only area fines, and rideshare pick-up and drop-off zones. It is essential to ensure that ongoing transport planning enhances access rather than creating new barriers to visitation.

Premier learning and innovation hub

Establishing a premier learning and innovation hub is a top priority, with exciting developments already underway, led by the two universities and supported by the council and other organisations. The panel recognises the opportunity for growth through increasing student accommodation, noting that only 50% of current University of Auckland accommodation applications can be accepted. Expanding accommodation aligns with the goal of growing the residential population. Over the next 12 months, the panel intends to prioritise enhancing the student experience in the city centre.

Increasing climate resilience

The panel is interested in positioning the city centre as a leader in sustainable outcomes and seeks to understand the specific opportunities and leverage in achieving this. Beyond resilience, the panel sees potential to promote sustainable practices that benefit the city's reputation and environment.

Central wharves masterplan

The upcoming expansion of waterfront access presents a valuable opportunity. The panel is keen to explore the benefits of this space and how it can contribute to the vibrancy and appeal of the city centre.

Celebrating tangata whenua

The panel emphasises the importance of celebrating and recognising the cultural significance of tangata whenua within the city centre and the vital role this plays as both an attraction and a unique feature of the area. This includes recognising Te Tōangaroa as the world's first tangata whenua precinct. The panel fully supports efforts to better integrate this precinct into the city centre, not only by enhancing physical connections but also by strengthening cultural and social ties that reflect the city centre's unique identity and heritage.

Benefits of sector collaboration

The panel acknowledged collaboration was a critical success factor in beginning to address issues around safety in the city centre and asked that learnings from this work be captured and applied elsewhere.

Next meeting: Monday 16 December, 2-5pm

Yours sincerely

Scott Pritchard
Independent Chair
CITY CENTRE ADVISORY PANEL