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AUCKLAND 2040: A RESILIENT URBAN REGION ON THE WATER

Further spatial expansion of Auckland is inevitable, but this does not have to lead to environmental disaster and a poor quality of life. An alternative approach has been developed.

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WHERE ARE WE?

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THE COMPACT CITY STRATEGY

Auckland Council believes that the best strategy for the management of the future growth of Auckland is the compact city. The compact city model is supported by the specific needs of Auckland, the so-called "monopolistic urban land use." The key themes of the compact city are containing urban expansion and promoting mixed-use developments.

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expansion and increasing population densities by building more concentrated building fabrics, typically 5-6 story mixed-use apartment and office blocks. With increased population density comes more efficient use of public transport, and this lessens dependency on the car, with the associated benefits of less pollution and an increase in pedestrian and cyclist activity. Other benefits posited by advocates of the compact city are lower energy consumption, a better social mix and tighter community life (Frey 1998). We believe that there are at least six reasons why the CCMUL model is both inappropriate and ineffective for the future growth of Auckland:

1. It’s too late: the car has shaped most of the growth of the Auckland area – the horse has well and truly bolted.

2. Wrong geography – it is hard to have a dense, compact city on a site like Auckland. The land for development is severely constrained by the central city’s position on an isthmus between the Pacific and the Tasman; the coastline is heavily indented with a huge number of estuaries there are ranges, Nth volcanic cones and basins and protected forests in most directions.

3. Technology – both the trends in information technology (IT) and environmental technology (ET) domains are pointing towards increased decentralisation and mobility. The same with transport technology (TT), never mind the expected crisis of the automobile due to the imminent peak oil situation. Indeed personal automobile will become more expensive but the impact will be moderated with further efficiency gains, energy sources substitution and behavioural change. Overall, the combined IT, ET and TT developments will only strengthen the centrifugal forces in urbanisation.

4. Sustainability is not all about cars – there is at least as much evidence that urban sustainability does not depend on density – and travel distances – as there is that it does. The role of the compact development in urbanism has been exaggerated for a long time. Regarding dirty energy consumption and GHG emissions, the main concern is the buildings, not the vehicles.

5. The sustainability/resilience transition – the new focus on resilience (instead sustainability, economic and environmental picture and concluded that cities are critical in the global battle for sustainable development. A new, green urban economy, based on eco-planning and eco-design innovation and massive transition to clean (green) technology seems inevitable. This model is not only needed in Auckland – in fact it is easier to achieve it in Auckland than in most cities. Our research suggests that Auckland should grow along two rationales, industrial and commercial growth.

The challenge for intensifying Auckland’s urban development by the water is to find sites that are not going to attract the opprobrium of existing inhabitants, yet can provide a water experience.

The natural suitability of land for urban development in the Auckland region shows that potential future growth of Auckland can only make it even more a linear city.

The overall land suitable for urbanisation is about 100 km long and on average 15 to 25 km wide. Thus the linear shape and organisation (infrastructure) is almost inevitable. Should there be any valid reason to fight the linearity trend, any policies and instruments aimed at delivering a different shape would have a very hard time succeeding.

The water city (Figure 2)

As already noted, Auckland is located on an isthmus between two harbours and between two seas. It is cut with a myriad of streams from the dominant ranges: the Waitakere to the northwest and Hunua to the southwest. All in all, Auckland is a very “watery world” (Twy 2005). As Aucklanders have a special relationship to the water. Just as the square is the meeting place for European communities, the beach is the place where all Aucklanders, regardless of social position, gather to swim, surf, and play.

A DELIBERATE DUALITY

The resulting concept is a combination of the water city and the linear city. The duality is deliberate and fortunate – the two ideas highlight the dialectic of contemporary life where the rationality of work and production opposes the hedonism of free time and consumption. More importantly, the two herald the new culture of urban living – the reconciliation of the work play dichotomy and the meeting of economy and lifestyle. The water city symbolises the attraction of the beach and the waterside living; it embodies the philosophy of a good life between nature and the city.

The linear city is the backbone of the entire metropolitan with the heavy transport infrastructure and a series of urban nodes serving as high-density, mixed-use town centres. The town centres have, to some degree, all the same
activities; on the other hand each one has some particular service or industry or amenity that makes them unique in the ‘necklace’ and complementary to other centres. Thus, wherever you are in the ‘necklace’, you are 10 or 20 minutes away by train or bus or car from the town centre that has your requirements.

The linear city is the symbol and guarantee of Auckland’s efficiency. The water city is the symbol and locus of Auckland’s status as the ‘world’s lifestyle capital’.

Each town centre has some particular service or industry or amenity that makes them unique in the ‘necklace’ and complementary to other centres. Thus, you are only 10 or 20 minutes away from the town centre that has your requirements.

The investigation demonstrates how a landscape-based methodology for an ecological urbanism can be developed from a close understanding of both infrastructure and landscape to produce a radically new design for the post-city Auckland.

The result, by 2040, would be a 100 km linear conurbation with about 10 city nodes along the infrastructure spine at a range of densities. Medium-to-low density development would be created around the harbours and coastline.

The world needs a new economy just like it needs a new model of how the contemporary city can develop. Approaching the city as a landscape, internally supported with green, grey, smart infrastructure, offers a fresh direction.

In Auckland’s case, due to a fortunate set of historic and geographic circumstances, this model would be easy to implement. By accepting a low-rise, regionally polycentric city, Auckland can become a new model of urban-regional development of relevance for all low-density cities in the world. This is of no little significance, globally speaking. Such cities now compromise 60% of all the urban fabric in the world, and within 10-20 years might even reach 90%. For them, the compact city model is of little relevance.

References

