

Submission by Auckland International Airport Limited for Draft Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy

Introduction

Auckland International Airport Limited (“Auckland Airport”) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the draft Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy (“RLTS”).

We are providing feedback as an advocate for the millions of travellers who fly into and out of Auckland Airport each year, the thousands of airport workers who commute on a daily basis, and the hundreds of companies that reside within or rely on the airport business district. All these airport users depend on a regional land transport infrastructure that provides an effective mix of quality public and private transport solutions. Moreover, further improvements to ground transport links are essential if Auckland Airport is to maximise its already significant contribution to the Auckland regional and national economies.

Our submission is in five parts, as follows:

1. An overview of Auckland Airport, focusing on its economic contribution and growth prospects.
2. A review of the importance of good ground transport links to the Airport, to air travellers and to other airport users, and the role Auckland Airport has played to date in supporting ground transport improvements.
3. A discussion on the special economic and social relationship that exists between a modern airport and the city region it serves. This evolving relationship has important implications for both spatial planning and regional transport planning.
4. Our general comments on the RLTS, focusing on those elements that impact on Auckland Airport and our stakeholders.
5. Our specific concerns regarding initiatives identified in the RLTS. In particular, we believe the RLTS should accelerate improvements to Airport-related public transport services, including the eventual provision of an Airport rail link. Additionally, there should be a clearer commitment to create a direct, high-quality connection between the Airport and the Auckland CBD for both public and private transport.

We trust the Auckland Regional Council views our comments as a constructive contribution to the discussion over the future shape of the region’s transport system. We would welcome the opportunity to be heard to discuss our submission in more depth. In the first instance, please use the contact details noted below.

Simon Moutter
Chief Executive
Auckland Airport

Address for service:

Auckland International Airport Limited
P O Box 73020
Auckland Airport
For: Peter Alexander, General Manager Property
Tel: 09 255 9180
Email: peter.alexander@aucklandairport.co.nz



1. Overview of Auckland Airport

- 1.1 Auckland Airport is an important contributor to the Auckland regional economy. We play a vital role in connecting New Zealand with the world and facilitating tourism, travel and trade. The airport is owned and operated by Auckland International Airport Limited, one of New Zealand's largest listed companies.
- 1.2 Auckland Airport was recently ranked as one of the world's top 10 airports and the best airport in the Australia/Pacific region, in the Skytrax World Airport Awards 2009 (a global survey of 8.2 million travellers). The high Skytrax ranking and solid performances in other customer satisfaction surveys are testament to the efforts being made to improve the traveller experience and the overall ambience of the Airport.
- 1.3 Auckland Airport:
- Facilitates more than 13 million travellers (including approximately 7.5 million international travellers) each year;
 - Is the gateway for 73% of New Zealand's international arrivals (and 91% of non-Australian arrivals);
 - Processes more than 100 international and 300 domestic flights per day;
 - Handles more than 200,000 tonnes of airfreight annually worth \$12.5 billion – New Zealand's second-largest cargo port by value
 - Accommodates some 900 businesses on its land, which provide approximately 12,000 jobs (making it a significant business district within the Auckland region);
 - Contributes around \$19 billion annually to the national economy (13.7% of GDP) and \$10.7 billion to the Auckland economy.
- 1.4 We have embarked on an extensive investment programme to ensure Auckland Airport can meet forecast growth in demand to around 25 million travellers per year over the next 10 to 15 years. Over the last five years, we have invested approximately \$500 million expanding and upgrading airport infrastructure and facilities.
- 1.5 In addition to aeronautical activities, a large variety of retail shopping and other services are located on the Airport's 1,500 hectares of land (including land for future development). Construction recently commenced on a 260 room, 4 star plus hotel in a joint venture between Tainui Group Holdings, Accor Hospitality and Auckland Airport. The hotel is scheduled for completion in time for Rugby World Cup 2011.
- 1.6 We make an important contribution to strengthening New Zealand's aviation links with the world. This includes developing new source markets for travel, new routes for air services and encouraging new airlines to fly to New Zealand.



2. Auckland Airport and Regional Transport

- 2.1 To deliver the best possible passenger experience and maximize potential economic contribution to the region, Auckland Airport must be well connected with all parts of region, by multiple modes of transport. Airport users should have an international quality efficient transport network with a range of choices
- 2.2 Auckland Airport has been a long-standing contributor to discussion and planning on the Auckland region's transportation needs. In particular, we are an advocate for improved private and public transport links between the Airport and key parts of the city, on behalf of both air travellers and the many thousands of workers who commute to the Airport on a daily basis.
- 2.3 The Airport travel experience has a high impact on travellers' perception of the quality of the Airport, Auckland and New Zealand. This journey between Airport and city is often both their first and last experience of our region and country. With almost half of New Zealand's population visiting the domestic or international terminals one or more times in a 12 month period, getting to and from the Airport is an experience relevant to many New Zealanders.
- 2.4 Transport access is a key influence on public perceptions of Auckland Airport. "Ease of getting to/from the Airport" is the most significant driver after check-in facilities and cleanliness of bathrooms (Source: 2009 TNS Auckland Airport Public Perceptions Survey). The same survey suggested that improved transport access is an important issue to get right.
- 2.5 Auckland Airport has been aware of this issue for some time and in 2004 commissioned an independent study into the issue of ground transport to the airport. The report concluded uncertainty of journey time was affecting, and would increasingly affect, both the travelling public and staff working at the Airport and its environs.
- 2.6 Auckland Airport has been pro-active in working with ARTA, territorial authorities and bus operators to progress:
 - An improved airport to CBD bus services (Airbus Express)
 - A bus link from Airport to North Shore (The Northern Flyer)
 - Use of Northern Busway by airport shuttles
 - Extended clear routes and bus lanes along main CBD/Airport transport arteries

All of these initiatives will lead to more reliable journey times for both travellers and Airport workers.

- 2.7 The 2004 study also recommended the introduction of a travel plan. Auckland Airport's travel plan "Lift" was officially launched in February 2006 and helps workers across the Auckland Airport community with improved travel choices. Part of the process has been the development of close and ongoing working relationships with authorities to improve public transport links, promote carpooling and cycling. Our efforts were recognised when Lift won the Transport Category of the 2009 Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA) Awards.



3 Airport and City– a Special Relationship

- 3.1 In reviewing transport links between an airport and the city region it serves, it is important to first consider the nature of a modern international airport - and the evolving dynamics of the economic and social relationship between airport and city.
- 3.2 The international airport of today is where the globalised world of international business meets local and regional commerce. It represents much more than a location where passengers and goods depart and land. Today, airports are increasingly recognized as places where people meet, where business gets done and meetings are held, where innovation takes place and where people go to relax and have a good time.
- 3.3 Airports, including Auckland, have tended to be developed initially outside metropolitan areas because of the space they require and their impact on the neighbouring environment. The city, however, ‘follows’ the airport, alongside with major investments in road and rail-infrastructure made to further integrate the airport in transportation networks on the ground. In this process the space between airport and city gets increasingly filled with economic activities that either need the airport’s vicinity (e.g. logistic activities) or benefit from the high level of accessibility in the corridor between airport and city (for further insights, see Airport and City, Schaafsma, Amkreutz & Guller, 2008)
- 3.4 Globally, airports are now being seen by city planners as an important element of regional economic development strategy. Planning concepts such as the “Airport City” “Aero City”, “Aerotropolis” and more recently “Airport Corridor” have emerged. The airport is where the local economy meets the global economy. A city’s ability to participate in the global economy and successfully compete with other cities requires that the city and its airport are cohesively integrated. Successful cities think of their airport not as a runway and terminal beyond the edge of the city, but as a thriving suburban business district, integrated with and supporting the endeavours of the city.
- 3.5 Auckland has an opportunity to optimise the development of the Airport district, to ensure the Airport’s contribution to the regional and national economy is maximised. An effective and efficient transport network is one of the most important elements to ensure that the Airport is cohesively integrated into Auckland.
- 3.6 The Auckland Regional Policy Statement (“RPS”) and Auckland Regional Growth Strategy (“RGS”) are foundation documents that have influenced the drafting of the Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy (“RLTS”). The RGS acknowledges the importance of the Airport as an infrastructure asset but stops short of designating it as an “Intensive Centre” or “Corridor” earmarked for intensified growth.
- 3.7 However, Auckland Airport is pleased to note the recent favourable decision on RPS Plan Change 13 that will (if sustained through appeals) extend Auckland’s metropolitan urban limits to cover the vast majority of Auckland Airport’s land. Auckland Airport sees that decision as overdue recognition of the importance of development around the Airport and the benefits that the Airport can bring to the community. In Auckland Airport’s view increased business activity at and around the Airport will add critical mass to support the viability of essential public transport connections to the Airport.



3.8 The Manukau City Council's draft Strategic Spatial Plan recognises the Airport as a "specialised centre". For its part, Auckland Airport has adopted the term "Airport Business District" to describe the Airport and associated development that has and will cluster around it.

4. General Comments on Draft Strategy

- 4.1 The draft Strategy (page 8) outlines the Preferred Strategic Option as a public transport-led approach, “where public transport services and infrastructure are provided ahead of demand in order to encourage greater public transport use.” The Preferred Strategic Option shifts the focus of investment from state highway construction into public transport improvements, behavior change, walking and cycling and local roads. It also supports the planned intensification of development in growth centres which will be well served by public transport.
- 4.2 We do not intend to take a position on overall merits of the Preferred Strategic Option but rather focus on those elements that impact on Auckland Airport and our stakeholders. We do note, however, that the Strategy takes a strong lead from the New Zealand Transport Strategy 2008. Since then, the Government has published its Government Policy Statement on Land Transport Funding 2009/10 – 2018/19 (“GPS”). The GPS strengthens the focus for transport planning and funding on national economic growth and productivity and transport services that encourage the efficient movement of freight and people. We support this focus and believe it will help facilitate the region maximizing the potential contribution of the Airport to the region.
- 4.3 At one level we are pleased to see frequent mention of Auckland Airport in the draft RLTS and to see specific airport initiatives included under the Activities of High Regional Significance in Policies 4.3, 6.2.1 and 6.2.2. However, there are initiatives that we believe should be included under those policies, and we believe that many of the airport initiatives need to be brought forward in time.
- 4.4 The Preferred Strategic Option is premised on encouraging the use of public transport through investment ahead of demand. We note that public transport connections to the Airport are currently weak by international comparisons. Public transport penetration to Auckland Airport is low at less than 3% (based on Airbus patronage figures for FY09) of passengers compared with, say, London’s Heathrow Airport at close to 30%. There is currently only the Airbus Express servicing the Airport with a frequency greater than half hourly. The Airbus Express moved to a fifteen minute frequency in June 2008 and to a twenty four hour operation in November 2009. The service therefore already meets and in some cases exceeds the QTN criteria, as defined most recently in the Nov 2009 Draft Auckland Regional Public Transport Plan. The notable exception is reliability, with travel times varying from under 30 minutes to well over an hour at peak times, due to a lack of bus priority between the Airport and CBD.
- 4.5 Although the Strategy intends to invest ahead of demand there is no significant short- to medium-term investment planned to ensure that the Airport has reliable public transport connections to the region that will be attractive enough to incentivise greater use. Public transport connections to the Airport are already insufficient to meet existing demand and therefore requires significant investment by transport authorities to bridge the existing gap before capacity for future growth can be provided. We therefore ask that the strategy include more short- to medium- term investment in appropriate bus priorities so the Airport is connected by a true QTN, at least to the CBD and preferably prior to Rugby World Cup 2011.

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- 4.6 Once in place, this QTN model could then be replicated from the Airport to the North Shore and both Eastern and Western suburbs.
- 4.7 Finally, a general comment on the concept of Activities of High Regional Significance. Whilst as outlined later in this submission we have concerns about some of these Activities in their current form, we believe that the concept is useful and potentially helpful. However, it would improve the clarity of the document if those activities could be gathered together in one place in the document rather than being spread as they are in the draft over Policies 4.3, 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, and Map 4.



5. Specific Concerns and Comments

5.1 Our specific concerns with the Strategy are as follows:

- a) There is generally a lack of detail around timing and delivery of a QTN to the Airport until the Airport is connected via an RTN sometime after 2030. We therefore are concerned that the Strategy offers very little improvement to Airport users in terms of public transport until rail is delivered sometime after 2030.
- b) There is no commitment to creating a direct connection to the CBD and other centres for both QTN and private transport. There is currently no established highway connection from the Airport to the CBD (for private vehicles, taxis and shuttles). Although an interim step of a Clear Route is soon to be implemented, that will not be on the Regional Strategic Network but will be via the suburbs of Royal Oak and Epsom. This is fundamentally incompatible with the character of those suburbs which are predominantly residential and have a very high concentration of schools.
- c) Although an RTN is planned, delivery is not anticipated before 2030 at the earliest, we believe this is too far in the future, particularly if an extensive QTN connection to the Airport is not provided in the shorter term. There is currently no RTN route designated or protected. Auckland Airport is committed to facilitating an RTN through Airport land but is concerned that no detailed planning or design work has been undertaken on the route beyond the Airport boundary. This is not only putting the route of an RTN to the Airport in jeopardy, but presents challenges for the Airport masterplanning, as development within the Airport district continues without a clear understanding of the RTN requirements. That comment applies also to planning adjacent to the Airport district in Airport Oaks and the eastern approaches to the Airport.
- d) The proposed upgrades of SH20A & SH20B are very necessary and welcome. They will however increase non-airport related traffic travelling through the Airport, including heavy goods traffic, and there should be provision to deal with that traffic. It is already clear that there has been a significant increase in traffic through the Airport on a road network that has not been designed to accommodate it.

5.2 To address the above concerns we believe that Strategy needs to be adjusted to reflect the following;

- a) *Until Auckland Airport is connected to a region wide RTN, ensure as a matter of priority that it is adequately connected to a region wide QTN, and that this QTN provides an appropriate connection to the Airport from both the CBD and the North Shore for both travelers and airport workers.*

Any public transport service to Auckland Airport needs to recognize that the Airport is a 24/7 operation and that airline passengers are absolutely time sensitive. Accepting that the Airport will be served by just the QTN in the short term, service levels for Airport public transport need to be adjusted to reflect both the 24/7 nature of the Airport and to recognise that air travellers need certainty over journey time for public transport. It is difficult to see how the required service levels for Airport services can be achieved if the relevant QTN services do not run on priority lanes. Auckland Airport



is aware of proposals (but no date for delivery) to upgrade Dominion Road to that standard but the connections of the northern end of Dominion Road to both the CBD and the Regional Strategic Network (from the North Shore) seem very uncertain. Those connections need to be addressed as a matter of urgency and should be included as Activities of High Regional Significance under Policy 4.3.1. (We expand on this further in our submission to ARTA on the Regional Public Transport Plan).

- b) *Give greater priority to the proposed South Western Corridor to East Tamaki link to provide a more direct and unencumbered arterial connection to the Airport from the CBD and the North Shore.*

We note under Policy 6.2.2 that the South Western Corridor to East Tamaki link is identified as an Activity of High Regional Significance but only to the extent of planning, protecting and identifying funding. This suggests to us that there is no plan to have the link operational within the 30 year life of the proposed 2010 Strategy. That is an unacceptable time for the region to have to wait for a direct unencumbered Regional Strategic Network link to the Airport from the North Shore and the CBD. Whilst there will be links in the shorter term via SH16/SH20 and SH1/SH20 those are sub-optimal. In regard to Maps 4 & 5 in the draft Strategy, Map 4 shows the link as “Public Transport” whilst Map 5 should show the link as “Future Strategic Route”.

- c) *As part of improved SH 20A/20B access to the Airport, provide better connectivity between 20A and 20B to ensure that traffic transiting the Airport district does not impede traffic servicing or accessing airport facilities.*

This matter needs to be addressed under Policy 6.2.1. In regards to timing of upgrades of SH 20A and 20B, the March 2009 “Strategy Report on the SH 20A/20B Airport Access Strategic Study” for NZTA/ARTA/AIAL recommended significant upgrading of both roads in the period 2008-2018.

- d) *Confirm as a matter of first priority the alignment of the proposed airport rail link immediately outside the Airport district, so that Auckland Airport can make appropriate provision in the Airport Masterplan.*

Policy 4.3.2 states that “it is expected that the Airport rail will be constructed in the period 2031-40”. We comment on that proposed timing below, but a more relevant part of Policy 4.3.2 in regard to our point here is the earlier statement that “only limited investigations have been carried out to date on the detailed route of the rail connections, how the introduction of rail would be staged, and what bus services should be established in the interim”. All those matters are critical to Airport Masterplanning, so there needs to be more certainty in the RLTS as to when those matters would be determined. In our view they need to be determined within the next two years, as we note that the determined alignment will also impact on off-airport infrastructure like the proposed Kirkbride grade separation.

- e) *Provide a RTN link to the Airport (whether that is rail or some intermediate step) on an accelerated basis (ideally, prior to 2020), rather than between 2031-40 as currently proposed.*



Again referring to Policy 4.3.2, waiting till 2031-40 for an RTN to the Airport is simply unacceptable given the ongoing importance of the Airport to the regional and national economies, and the level of service that can be provided by a QTN.

- f) *As part of improving the efficiency of ground transport to the Airport, extend the current provision, which allows airport shuttles to use the Northern Busway, to other arterials and QTN routes (that will provide priority for public transport) to the Airport into the future.*

Airline passengers have particular demands in respect to travel to and from an airport. In both cases they invariably are travelling with bulky luggage and also they are interested in a mode of travel which in regard to time is commensurate with the speed of air travel. Particularly for domestic travel, travellers are interested in the door-to-door travel time. It needs to be accepted that a scheduled RTN or QTN may not provide the level of service sought by many travellers. That is why even at major European airports a significant percentage of passengers still travel to and from an airport in Low Occupancy Vehicles, either private cars, rental vehicles or taxis. Allowing Airport shuttles to use public transport priority lanes should encourage some of those travellers into High Occupancy Vehicles. This objective should be added into Policies 5.2.4 and 5.3.3.