

Council Briefing Minutes

Date: Wednesday, 22 July, 2020
Time: 1:30 p.m.
Location: Council Chamber
Forum North, Rust Avenue
Whangarei

In Attendance

Her Worship the Mayor Sheryl Mai
(Chairperson)
Cr Gavin Benney
Cr Vince Cocurullo
Cr Nicholas Connop
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Jayne Golightly
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid

Not in Attendance

Cr Shelley Deeming
Cr Greg Martin

Scribe N. Pestana (Team Leader Democracy)

1. Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor Shelley Deeming. Councillor Greg Martin was not in attendance.

Her Worship the Mayor convened the meeting and welcomed the consultants from Opus to the briefing.

2. Reports

2.1 Complete Streets Masterplan Update

Dominic Kula (General Manager, Strategy and Democracy) recapped the process to date. City Centre planning goes back to the adoption of the City Centre Plan in 2017. The Complete Streets Masterplan is a specific action from the City Core Precinct Plan adopted in May 2019.

Prior to today's briefing, elected members received a report addressing key issues raised by elected members at the 20 May 2020 Council Briefing and the draft Complete Streets Masterplan.

Dominic Kula acknowledged that there have been some key/recurring issues that we have previously spent time working through. For some detail / answers were provided in information distributed prior to this briefing (i.e. the outcomes of traffic modelling) while for others (i.e. busses), there is a Council resolution directing staff. However, for many the mechanism to resolve these issues will be through inclusion of funding in the 2021 – 2031 Long Term Plan (i.e. for investigation of an overbridge and/or for parking buildings).

As the key issues have been points of discussion over the last 14 months, and the mechanisms to resolve / progress many of these will fall outside of the Complete Streets Masterplan (i.e. through LTP funding), we propose to work through these up-front. We will also provide an overview of feedback from business sector engagement.

However, the main focus of today's briefing will be an overview of the Complete Streets Masterplan (including a high level look at individual streets), ideally with direction on priorities for the LTP process.

As discussed previously, funding is a decision for elected members to make. As this is a 30-year vision, there are likely to be only a handful of projects within the next LTP. For implementation to occur within the next 3 years, staff will therefore need direction on which, if any, projects Council wants prioritised within the LTP.

Dominic Kula handed over to Sonya Seutter (Senior Strategic Planner) who covered the content of the briefing as outlined in the agenda report and the presentation on the Whangarei Complete Streets Masterplan.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

Key issue – Cycleways and connectivity.

- Generally, elected members indicated that connecting our cycleways should be prioritised. There was a view that the proposed connection from Kamo Shared Path at Vinery Lane, along Dent Street through Reyburn Street to Okara is a very steep route and thus is not the route people generally use. Jeffrey Devine (Strategy and Planning Manager) advised that the walking and cycling strategy provided for connections and the detailed design would be worked through as projects come on stream.

- There was a suggestion that the shared path should be extended from Rust Avenue to Walton Street.

Key issue – Car Parking.

- There was discussion on the plan's inclusion of 90° angle on-street car parking, it was felt that this will cause issues for motorists and 45° angle on-street car parks would be easier for motorists. Jeffrey Devine advised that all car parking is determined by the size of the road and the speed environment, car parking at 90° angles may make more parking available but this must be considered through the detailed design stages based on the characteristics of the location. The plan aims to maximise parking by providing short term parking for shoppers, not long-term parking for commuters.
- There was discussion on the creation of additional car parks. Elected members were advised that the aim of the plan is to utilise the carparking we already have better to service the businesses in town. There is provision in the plan for the development of three carparking buildings and redevelopment of the James / John Street carpark which would increase the number of car parks in town exponentially. Funding for a carpark building could be considered through the LTP but Council may also need to consider parking rates across town to make the building commercially viable (particularly if it were privately funded).

Key issue – Buses.

- There was a view that Rose Street could be a long-term bus hub and the focus should be on making this an attractive bus hub.

Key issue – Dent Street Pedestrian Crossing.

- Elected members agreed that the connection between the waterfront and the city centre was a priority, clear direction on how to achieve this was not provided. Some elected members indicated that further consideration should be given to a pedestrian overbridge over Dent Street while other elected members felt that having one point to cross Dent Street is not a feasible option and the current crossings should be enhanced as opposed to funnelling people into one crossing point. Elected members generally agreed that however the connection is created, it is important that Dent Street is accessible to vehicles and there is no impact on the traffic flow.

General feedback

- Bank Street – the Bank Street Revitalisation Group have spearheaded the revitalisation of Bank Street over a number of years. We should be conscious of previous commitments when prioritising projects.
- Walton Street – should be very attractive as the entry into town. Could provide a cycleway connection as part of the cycleway network.
- John and James Streets - it was suggested that these streets would be a good focus as priority projects to build on work already done and connect the Town Basin and City Centre. Elected members were supportive of this suggestion.
- It was felt that the plan addresses the balance between an aesthetic and a utilitarian city well. Comfort with it as a 30-year strategy.
- It was noted that the development of commercial property in town will influence future projects, and we need to be flexible in allowing for this. The role of the Commercial Property Committee was highlighted.
- There was a view that the plan is politically naïve and needs to be bolder. Generally, support what is in the plan but there should be three or four catalyst projects that elected members support / prioritise for funding in the 2021-2031 Long Term Plan. Management was challenged to bring this back to elected members.

Summary

The challenge was acknowledged and based on feedback received, a summary and proposed way forward were outlined.

In summary it was noted:

- Elected members expressed a level of comfort with the plan as a flexible blue print, recognising the plan needs to be able to respond to development and change.
- We need to nail connectivity, cycleways and shared paths along with maximising parking based on street typology/width (i.e. through detailed design).
- Projects that drive connectivity and cycleway linkages came through as a clear priority (Walton Street was discussed as a potential cycleway connection to investigate).
- John and James Streets were also supported as potential early priorities.
- There were mixed views around the potential for an overbridge at Dent Street.

In terms of a way forward, it was proposed to seek formal endorsement of the draft plan as a working blueprint and then bring key cycleway / shared path projects and John and James Streets back to elected members through the LTP process to prioritise alongside other funding priorities.

Elected members indicated that they were generally comfortable with this approach.

3. Closure of Meeting

The briefing concluded at 15.27pm.