

Council Briefing Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 9 August, 2022
Time: 10:30 a.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 (virtual)
Cr Ken Couper
Cr Tricia Cutforth
Cr Jayne Golightly
Cr Phil Halse
Cr Greg Innes
Cr Greg Martin
Cr Anna Murphy
Cr Carol Peters
Cr Simon Reid

Not in Attendance Cr Shelley Deeming

Scribe Sue Reid (Democracy Adviser)

1. Apologies / Kore Tae Mai

Apologies were received from Cr Deeming for absence and from Crs Cutforth and Peters for late arrival.

Her Worship the Mayor convened the briefing at 10:30 a.m. and handed over to Mr Simon Weston (Chief Executive) to introduce those who were supporting the briefing.

2. Reports / Ngā Ripoata

2.1 Airport Location Options Study - Issues and Options

Mr Weston welcomed:

Mr Fraser Campbell – Campbell Consulting (virtual)

Mr Rick Pemberton – Technical Director, Airport Engineering, Beca (virtual)

Mr Graeme Roberts – Technical Director, Planning, Beca

Ms Stacey Sharp – Senior Planner, Beca

Mr Weston said there had been an extended consultation period of ten weeks, the technical report had been completed and the purpose of this briefing was to provide Elected Members with an update for the project and feedback from consultation. He handed over to Mr Campbell to take Elected Members through the presentation.

Mr Campbell commenced the presentation and expanded on the project background and technical reporting before handing over to Ms Sharp who covered the areas around community engagement. She said there had been significant interest in the project which didn't necessarily correlate into submissions received and that the locations of respondents had a direct correlation to the level of submissions.

Mr Roberts continued the presentation and covered future proofing. He said by designating a site, Council is signaling to the community that they have an option for the long-term future that is feasible and advisable. The future of aviation is uncertain, we don't know whether new hybrid planes will require longer or shorter runways. Designating a site recognises this is a long-term investment.

Mr Campbell concluded the presentation which covered choosing a proposed site and further work required. He said that no site is free of constraints but the proposed site should be Site 9, however if during more detailed investigations something comes up to make it unsuitable, it would be sensible to reconsider the other two as a fallback position.

Elected members feedback and discussion included:

- Mr Roberts was asked what the trigger would be for Council to make a commitment towards designation, would it be an Air New Zealand or CAA requirement for a greater length of airport runway.
He responded that it came down to a Council decision about whether they give a signal to the community at this stage that we think future proofing is necessary, we have looked at the alternatives and are happy to proceed this way. Council holds the majority of the land needed for Site 9 but would be obliged to purchase a few properties around the edge. Mr Roberts doubted there would be impending action from the CAA but Council wanted to be in a position to bring it forward if that happened.
- In response to a question, Mr Roberts agreed that the designation might only cover the airport footprint itself but plan change boundaries might be extended a bit wider to consider supporting aviation related activities. He

said, in relation to plan change, there is some time to think that through and keep options open.

- Referring to the preferred site, Mr Roberts was asked if Council could give some confidence to other people we are not going to disrupt their lives and will go with the one preferred site.

He responded that we will probably know very early in the process of doing further technical work. There may be a potential for burial caves on Site 9 which they would want to look at in the early stage, but they have a lot of refinement of the technical detail issues and his confidence level that the Site 9 will be suitable is well above 80%.

Mr Pemberton added that there is a high level of confidence but there are a number of studies they need to do.

- In response to a query whether there had been consultation with central government agencies around this project, Mr Weston said it had been made clear that the project needs to be further along for central government to consider funding.

Mr Roberts added that it might be a low priority on the government's agenda and once a decision has been made, Council needs to have a conversation with the government again about carrying the project forward. The legitimate thing is that this is forward thinking planning for the district.

- Mr Campbell was asked what stage the evaluation is at. He said staff from the Ministry of Transport continue to be involved in the project. There has been a change in personnel but they have brought on new staff who are dealing with airports. No detail assessment has done for the three sites to see what infrastructure is required to support them. It is the timing that is important about what those costs might be considering the project might be ten years away and the best we can do is look at the current costs to compare locations.

Mr Campbell said this would not be a short project – the planning procedures would be two to three years, detailed site investigations would run parallel with that but could be potentially be four to five years. He said it is a minimum of eight to ten years away from actually breaking ground and if Onerahi is kept going for as long as possible, this will push the process further out. The cost will escalate in that time but Council has acquired the bulk of the land so there is a future proof option sitting there waiting. He said it was very difficult to give a timeline as there will be a series of events which will lead to the conclusion to start the process.

Mr Weston said at the start of the project, staff indicated it was a long term project and that once it's designated it will sit there for a while and when we get to the point of needing to do something, probably in about seven or eight years, we will be able to do it. Like all big pieces of infrastructure,

they are started before they are actually needed, but the point is you have something ready to protect your option for the future.

- Mr Campbell was asked if the cost estimates included upgrading roading or just construction itself. He responded the estimates taken in 2018 provided supporting infrastructure but there has been no detailed assessment and a provision has been made to allow for that. The other two sites required more investment than Site 9 in terms of roading and wastewater.
- Responding to a comment on the economic benefits of having an airport in the area, Mr Roberts said, in his experience, airports open all sorts of development opportunities and Council will need to take into consideration what other options and opportunities open themselves up from that. Also, what changes need to come through to the District Plan to allow those district development opportunities.

Referring to development around the surrounding area, Mr Roberts said there would be two designations – a footprint of the airport and then the three-dimensional space around the airport. He said Council might want to look any additional controls that might be desirable in the area of the airport.

- Mr Pemberton was asked if the technological reports took the issue of fog into account. He said in terms of weather in general they did not have data for all the sites and could not set up meteorologic stations. In terms of fog, they did reject one site as it wasn't going to work but for the other sites they only have rough information and do want to put instrumentation in so they have a better idea of fog. For the 95% useability you want, this roughly translates to 15 – 20 dates when you could be interrupted by weather and this has been acknowledged as one of the less desirable characteristics of Site 9.

Mr Campbell added that you are not just reliant on weather conditions in Whangarei but also affected by those where fog cancels or delays flights in Auckland. Fog is an issue for New Zealand due to its climate and location and there is nothing we can do when there is fog in Auckland. He said Beca are recommending that a weather site be installed for Site 9. Although fog is an issue it is unlikely there would be any more closures due to fog than there are at Onerahi.

- Responding to a question whether there was some likelihood that there will be more work done by Air New Zealand on smaller aircraft, Mr Roberts said the operational cost of an aircraft related to the capital cost of the asset, fuel consumption and staffing. The optimum size of a regional aircraft is now in the 50 – 70 seat range and it is likely Air New Zealand will settle on something in this range, possibly something larger for regional services. We may see more inter-regional flights occurring but Air New Zealand are reluctant to share their thinking.

- Mr Roberts was asked what the advantages were of designating a site now and he said that it would be preferable to give the community a signal of where the airport is going and the direction Council is taking..
Mr Weston said with Site 9 there are options on the runway alignment and the next land purchase depends on which alignment you go for.
- When asked if there was a regional government group that looked at air strategy, Mr Campbell said the Ministry of Transport have a group who have responsibility for joint venture airports. There are a number of airports which have received funding from the government but they are lacking in a government policy statement dealing with air transport and the government's role in that longer term. He said if, at some stage in the future, the government does make a decision to continue to support regional, Whangarei will be in a good position to take advantage of this. If they say there is no role for central government, Whangarei will still be in a good position as Council will have invested in land which can be sold in the future.
- Mr Pemberton was asked if Onerahi current has meteorological data to compare with Site 9. He said they do have wind data from Onerahi but they would want to install equipment and get local information on wind from the local sites and this would be compared with the information from the Onerahi site.

Hew Worship said there will be a final meeting on 24 August to discuss at Council.

3. Closure of Meeting / Te katinga o te Hui

The briefing concluded at 12:21 p.m.

Cr Cutforth arrived at 10:34 a.m.

Cr Peters arrived at 11:03 a.m.