



The Northern Action Group Incorporated

4 December 2024

Minister Hon Simeon Brown,
Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown,

Auckland Council/CCO relationship reform: AT and Watercare

Well done on the proposed changes to how Auckland Transport (AT) functions within Auckland Council (AC)! but why not extend that to Watercare as well at the same time? The structural issues are the same.

Local water done well is only part of the story for local government. Because Watercare is commercial and charges water users for its services it has been able to maintain a degree of independence and separation from AC that AT could not because of its dependence on ratepayer and NZTA funding.

But structuring independence of the CCOs from the outset was always going to raise questions about regional conflicts in policy and priorities for resource use. Unitary Authorities were supposed to resolve that, but creating independent CCOs for Auckland just swapped area based conflicts across the region for functionally separate ones.

The spatial planning idea was great, but the structure for implementation of CCOs undermined it and prevented integration and compliance with plans.

The fact that Watercare has not attracted the same attention as AT does not mean there are not similar problems of lack of integration and consistency with AC's planning and priorities. Because the CCO's operate independently of AC it is inevitable that they develop their own approach to policies, priorities and operational management that produce conflicts with Auckland Council's planning and the resources available to other AC departments. Instead they should be integrating their activities with, and within, the intentions of Auckland Council.

As Wayne has discovered, Statements of Intent are not instructions and can be interpreted in ways that allow independent CCOs to subtly (or not so subtly) implement their own alternative or contrary policies, priorities and timeframes. These may also be "shaped" or guided by the views of professionals employed to manage investment and services and there is no accountability to either AC or ratepayers.



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In Rodney we have three glaring current examples of ad hoc development and lack of integration of infrastructure development and consistency with considered plans:

- 1) Approval of the “Ridge” development proceeded without any wastewater infrastructure to connect it to the Watercare pumping station in Warkworth.

Because of planning and decision changes and delays, Watercare’s pipeline proposal was going to create disruption to the Warkworth town centre and materially affect business (like the CRL has with Queen Street).

It has only been with the persistent intervention of local engineers and professionals talking with Watercare experts and engineers that an acceptable engineering and commercial solution has been produced. This is a first for Watercare in terms of community engagement and structuring the best possible solution. Such integration with local communities and engagement at the project delivery level is uncommon for them, as these independent specialist CCO organisations have their own plans and priorities for Regional and District development.

- 2) The second classic example is in Kumeū where Auckland Transport's Supporting Growth Alliance has worked with developers to produce plans which are against the interests of local communities and Auckland Council. (Council does not want development in areas subject to flooding).

These plans and NORs for the supporting roading are being sensibly exposed by Kumeū locals (Future Kumeū) suggesting more suitable alternatives away from flood prone areas.

- 3) The Warkworth South development is an example of an ad hoc proposal before its time, now seeking Plan Change approval to proceed well in advance of AC’s structure planning for the area (it’s a “Fast Track” project) with implications for:
 - The town centre – more traffic, no parking and retail impacts – not considered;
 - Other “Live Zone” areas which also have not been considered. This includes existing uncompleted subdivision developments with dwelling capacity;
 - Infrastructure and services for the local and expanded District population (if the project succeeds) which will not be serviced for 20+ years;
 - Roading and transport – for which no funding is available for 20+ years;
 - Planning and development for the whole Warkworth/Mahurangi area outside the Urban Rural boundary (which has been ignored)
 - Watercare – which now has to develop projects and proposals for taking over a planned separate water and wastewater system for the development which it had not previously expected.



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Projects like these force a reactive approach from AC's CCOs with high potential to cause long term problems, waste and local dissatisfaction from hasty decision making not well linked to spatial plans and local circumstances.

Just as Future Kumeū was needed to represent local concerns and show up the CCO's mistakes, poor District spatial planning by AC (which is not being followed anyway), and the lack of any coordinated District infrastructure planning that actually get followed means the Warkworth Area Liaison Group is now having to get local professional planning and experts together to promote integrated plans for development of the whole Warkworth/Mahurangi area.

Since Watercare is self-funded it's free to proceed with infrastructure development to timings which do not reflect AC's Investment Priority Areas and availability of development resources and funding. As a consequence we still have this continual mismatch between commercial Real estate development interests and Auckland council planning and priorities where activities of CCO's cut across Auckland's plans and timing for development -making the time cost and effort to do the planning wasted.

As Auckland Council seeks to take back an integrated approach to regional planning for transport development and services it should be doing the same thing for water. The region's water concerns are not just drinking water and waste water in reticulated areas but also water management in rural and unreticulated areas, including stormwater (and drainage from roads), flooding, overland flow paths, coastal inundation concerns, and catchment and aquifer management. Within regional guidelines Proper District spatial plans can address and guide wanted development.

The current lack of integration means that CCO activity for other than major projects (which get attention) is not planned but responsive to initiatives from private interests seeking plan changes or consents to maximise the value of their isolated land investment without following, but rather changing to suit themselves, Auckland spatial structural and development plans.

Your approach to AT should also be applied to Watercare, and AC should be required to integrate its resource planning activity, produce some proper District plans (not just subdivision development plans called Structure Plans) - and then stick to the plans and timings. Plan changes should be rare and reasonable, well considered and supported by local communities.

Kind regards

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