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Speech to the Urban Design Forum

Designing Auckland for the future

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I want to acknowledge the huge contribution that you have and will make to the future design of Auckland.

Someone said to me the other day the advantage of being a younger MP is that you can look at things from a much longer perspective; the disadvantage is that if you get it wrong you could be blamed for half a century. Now I am not suggesting that I will be in politics for 13 terms but I am just letting you know that I understand that people have pretty long memories and I acknowledge the responsibility that comes with this job.

Today I want to talk about a couple of themes that I think could help make Auckland stand out in the world. I am sure every electorate MP will tell you how their electorate is really special but there are a couple of key aspects of Auckland Central that make this electorate unique and of national significance.

It would be difficult to name a place in the country that has a rural isolated community like Great Barrier, a peri-urban island like Waiheke with some of the most wealthy and poorest people in New Zealand, the largest business district in the country and the villages of the Western Bays. This electorate represents the many diverse communities of New Zealand. This diversity means representing it is not only an honour but a great challenge.

By 2031 there will be over 2 million Aucklanders. Auckland has a younger population than the rest of New Zealand with a high number of young Māori and Pacific youth. Our city is very diverse and how we better engage with people who are younger and of different ethnicities is going to be very important in the future.

Auckland Governance

Next week the select committee report will be out – some people will not be happy and some will, but it is unlikely the people who will be pleased will issue hoards of press releases in support just because the select committee has listened to them. The fact is for the majority of Aucklanders they are tired of sitting in traffic, they want access to the waterfront, strong communities and a more modern city.

I am confident that we will deliver the strong regional council that Auckland has never had and one that is balanced by strong local bodies empowered to deliver for their communities. While the government did not agree with all the conclusions or recommendations of the Royal Commission, I do believe that the report was very thorough and an excellent body of work of which the commissioners should be proud. There are still a number of issues that the Royal Commission and members of the public raised during the select committee process that will be addressed in the next bill. Governance is only part of what is needed to deliver a great city; people matter and their buy in to the city is important.

High-Tech Auckland

Technology will be crucial in moving Auckland into the 21st century. Because we have a small population we have a competitive advantage that enables us to keep up with technology. It comes down to our size and our ability to change quickly. The Auckland Transition Authority is working to amalgamate the disparate ICT systems from the different councils and build a digital infrastructure to support the city. An organisation called Next Space says there is an opportunity to leverage from this process and deliver a high-tech infrastructure necessary for a competitive global city.

There is a huge opportunity to deliver every Aucklander a portal that enables them to see 3 dimensional images of their city and communities. Imagine getting a fly through of a home that you want to buy before buying it. Imagine you're a company developing a piece of public land and you can see what the project will look like in advance without spending a load of money. I feel strongly about this because I believe the transition period is an opportunity to deliver something exceptional and accessible to Aucklanders. That is why I am going to ask the Auckland Transition Authority to explore this project.

Emerald Auckland – Greening up Auckland

Other cities have been called Emerald cities because of their commitment to the environment. We could be an Emerald city but if we want to be, we will have to do a lot more in terms of urban design and renewal to achieve this. Unfortunately the centre of Auckland does not currently reflect the clean green brand of New Zealand. Tourists need to see the beauty of New Zealand from the beginning of their journey and this usually starts in Auckland.

There is some activity happening around urban renewal and there are some real pockets of success in Auckland. An example of this was the opening of NZI Centre last night – I look forward to exploring the building and seeing their rooftop garden that I have heard a lot about. This building is a shining example of a green building and it is great that they have received 5 stars.

The New Zealand Green Business Council is doing some great work as is the Sustainable Business Network. I would like to see us convert more of our buildings in the central city to green buildings.

An idea that has been floated is an ANZAC Centenary bridge. The proposal is a cablestayed multimodal replacement bridge from Wynyard Pt to Onewa Rd with dual rail tracks, the eight existing traffic lanes, a cycleway and a walkway. The argument is that a major iconic urban redevelopment project could win the hearts and minds of Auckland and that its delivery could be a statement of success for the new governance model. I think it is a very exciting project that we should explore.

The next phase of RMA reform will cover a workstream called urban design which I believe will be crucial in assisting us to deliver what could be an Emerald City. I hope that you will engage with this piece of work to get better urban design outcomes for our city.

Metro Auckland

When I say Metro, you may think that I am talking about the magazine but I am

actually talking about the heart of my electorate. We currently call it the central business district but the future of this space is not just about business but about the people who live there, who work there and who play there. There are a number of big ticket transport projects that we need to sit and work out which are the priority. One project in this basket is the cbd rail loop that I believe is necessary due to projected growth in the cbd. It will be delivered at some point but there is a debate to be had as to when that is.

It is positive that we also have movement on the waterfront with the progression of projects like Queens and Jellicoe Wharves. The Rugby World Cup is proving to be a good catalyst to help move some of these projects. However, it is really important that we are connecting all these projects together. The learning sector and the arts and culture sector are also important parts of the metro area and the new Auckland council will need to ensure they are being heard. I represent the people who live in the metro area and they are an important voice in this debate and I intend to ensure their voice is also heard.

The Royal Commission advocated for a Waterfront Development agency. I believe we need to ensure that whatever entity is established it delivers an integrated metro area. Whoever is charged with leading that entity has the potential to help deliver a huge legacy for Auckland. The metro area is of national significance. Many Ministers have an interest in Metro Auckland and I will continue to work alongside them as the local Member of Parliament.

Conclusion

So how will Auckland look in the future?

I see a waterfront where Aucklanders can run, walk and play.

I see an Auckland that is cleaner and greener

I see an Auckland with cutting edge technology not just in business but also in the home

Today I want to acknowledge the responsibility and talents that you bring to redesigning a better Auckland. I look forward to working with you to achieve this.