

February 11, 2010

Committee Secretariat  
Auckland Governance Legislation  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington.



Submission to the Select Committee considering the

## Local Government (Auckland Law Reform) Bill.

The Urban Design Forum supports the Government's moves to reform the governance of Auckland, but is concerned by some of the detail and the absence of some matters which we feel should be addressed.

The Third Bill sets out, among other things, operating provisions for Auckland Transport, and sets the parameters for the new Spatial Plan.

Both those features of the Bill will have profound effects on the urban development of our city, and while the words around them seek to reassure us that the ultimate goal is a better Auckland, the lack of specific provisions to improve the quality of our urban environment is a concern.

For instance, the Royal Commission on Auckland Governance stressed the importance of better urban design, and specifically proposed structuring Auckland's governance to encourage and make possible significantly better quality urban environments.

The Commission recognised that in today's global world, the quality of a place is vitally important to its economic, social and environmental success. This means the new council cannot just be about the efficient delivery of core services like roading, water and libraries. It also has to plan and deliver these services in a way that helps to improve the quality and functionality of the many diverse places that make up Auckland.

Auckland is not one big city, it is a city of many places, shaped by its landscape, coastline and communities.

It is from these places that economic and community networks grow and develop. Some places need to be redesigned through public works. Other places need to be allowed to redevelop and to build up by market forces. Infrastructure like roads, reserves and community facilities therefore need to be considered not just from the point of view of the bigger network, but also their contribution to local place making.

To this end, the Commission proposed keeping local streets under local council control, promoting their status as community space rather than as simply a through route. While regional arterial roads and motorways would come under the control of Auckland Transport, local streets would be allowed to develop character in keeping with the aspirations of the neighbourhood.

Streets are the primary public space in communities, and they need to be developed in a way that emphasises their place-making potential, with designs that encourage local travel on foot, cycle and public transport.

Our strategies need to say more about streets as places to generate economic and social interaction, and less about them as part of a city-wide transport network

Contrast that with the Bill's proposal for Auckland Transport. The design, construction, management and enforcement of all streets and roads are to come under its control on, as the Ministry of Transport website succinctly puts it, a "fence to fence basis". It even has the power to require property owners to build fences or cut down trees. The Council, on the other hand is left only with the powers of naming streets, allocating street numbers, controlling private roads and agreeing that Auckland Transport may borrow funds.

Further, the board of this Authority will be appointed by the Government for various terms up to 3 years before the election of the Auckland Council, and the public will not have access to its meetings, agendas or minutes.

We may hope the elected Council shares the balanced and considered urban growth aspirations of the Royal Commission, but will it find itself immediately stymied by a Transport Authority pushing a road transport agenda beyond Council's control?

The Spatial Plan is to be prepared to guide the growth of Auckland into the future. This was also a key recommendation of the Royal Commission, intended not only to create a shared vision of a future city, but also to simplify the overly complex planning process. It will replace current plans, particularly the Regional Growth Strategy, which has suffered from a lack of Government support and attacks by vested interests using the Resource Management Act as their weapon.

However, the Spatial Plan proposed in the Bill will have no more legislative clout than the doomed Regional Growth Strategy, and will be open to the same manner of attack. The LGAAA was enacted in 2004 to give some teeth to the Regional Growth Strategy and urban objectives, but it is being specifically repealed by this Act. It won't be until the RMA and the Local Government Act are reformed to align with the Spatial Plan that the whole picture will fall into place, which could be years away.

Rather than removing current impediments to creating a good city, are we simply replacing them with a new set?

The Government is putting in place only some of the bones of the Royal Commission's recommendations, perhaps with the intention that the new Auckland Council will flesh these out into a fully-functional body. This may work, and the involvement of central Government in the future shaping of Auckland is not necessarily a bad thing.

But we must keep the goal of a vastly improved Auckland as envisaged by the Royal Commission. They emphasised the importance of social fairness, cultural strength, and economic growth within a high quality built urban environment, so we increase our competitiveness with comparable cities elsewhere.

The Government is understandably focused on economic growth, but we strongly emphasise to the Select Committee the importance of the bigger picture.

We would like to speak to the Committee.

Graeme Scott  
For the Urban Design Forum  
c/o PO Box 5736  
Auckland.  
Tel 09 377 5332

[Graeme.Scott@ascarchitects.co.nz](mailto:Graeme.Scott@ascarchitects.co.nz)

[www.urbandesignforum.org.nz](http://www.urbandesignforum.org.nz)

The Urban Design Forum NZ (UDF) has worked to promote good urban design in New Zealand since 2000. Modeled loosely on similar groups in Australia and England, UDF is supported by the New Zealand Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Engineering and Surveying Institutes. The purpose of the Forum is to promote cross-disciplinary understanding of urban design amongst urban professionals, to raise awareness generally at the national and local levels of the benefits of urban design and to provide a forum for discussion of design-based approaches that are relevant to the development and management of New Zealand towns and cities.