

Leigh Auton, Chair
Tommy Parker, Project Director
Auckland Light Rail Project
Private Bag 100602
Auckland 1143

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Via email: lightrail@nzta.govt.nz

Dear Leigh and Tommy,

Effective rapid transit solutions to ease congestion and enable more people to get around by reliable and regular public transport, and support growth and development, is vital for Auckland. Equally, it's important that the right decisions are made for the right reasons.

You may be aware that Heart of the City has had longstanding and unanswered questions about the Light Rail project. We joined with other groups in 2019 to raise our concerns with the former Minister of Transport, one of which was the lack of meaningful engagement with Auckland.

We were somewhat heartened by the approach taken by Minister Wood, to re-engage with Auckland stakeholders. However, this has transpired to be an ineffective 'tick box' approach. I wish to set out our current concerns about this project.

Lack of substantive information

Currently we do not have information that enables us to assess the validity of the light rail project against other rapid transit options. After attending a "listening session" we are no wiser about why the proposed option is being considered over others. We have seen no data or analysis that supports the proposal and there is limited information about what options are being investigated and how this will integrate with the transport network. Delivering rapid transit isn't about just one project, it's about a network across the city and all project outcomes need to be considered in light of integration and network-wide outcomes. This work may have been done, but it is not clear to us in the brief material we have seen.

Furthermore, even if we had seen information that supports this project over others, there is no meaningful information about the current options being considered, including objectives, route, mode, technology, assessment of benefits, assessment of costs and funding model, timing, usage projections, ongoing ownership and opex costs, and the nature of disruption with each mode and how disruption will be managed. There is nothing tangible to enable us to provide a considered response, which is vital given the cost and level of disruption this project will bring.

The questions being asked for feedback are too simplistic and people would be answering with little knowledge of what is actually involved with delivering a project of this scale, how it would impact them and when. Businesses need as much certainty as possible and this project has, for many years, been spoken about with little or no substance.

Engagement/Process

Given the goal to obtain 'social licence' we had expected this opportunity to engage with Auckland would be an opportunity for meaningful dialogue. Not only have we been given minimal information, we have been asked for our "ideas and feedback" within the context of having very limited information to provide a considered response on. Furthermore, ideas and feedback we have previously given has not been responded to in the material we have seen.

Heart of the City wants to be able to engage in a constructive way, and we also want to ensure that the city centre business community has an opportunity to do so, however our view is that the current process does not allow this to happen. Responding to the questions asked would completely miss the severity of our concerns.

We ask that the engagement period prior to the business case be extended to allow time to provide quality information to stakeholders so they have an opportunity to understand the project more fully before providing any feedback.

Disruption

One of Heart of the City's key concerns is the level of disruption that a project of this scale would bring to the city centre, and the wider Auckland environment. There are serious learnings and action that must come from the City Rail Link project, which has caused years of disruption, financial and mental distress and it has ruined people's lives. This must not be repeated.

We have shared our views on this with the earlier Light Rail project team. It is our expectation that the insights and learnings gathered would be discussed with the business community rather than starting from a blank piece of paper.

Conclusion

We have serious reservations that there is not an adequate process in place to elicit constructive and useful feedback from stakeholders. We are concerned that it may be too late if this level of detail is only made available at the next stage of the project.

We do wish to engage in a meaningful way on what is an important issue for Auckland. It would be a good start to meet with you to discuss the points we have raised.

Yours faithfully



Viv Beck
Chief Executive