

I am pleased to present Greater Wellington Regional Council's Proposed Long-term Council Community Plan for the region (this Plan).

For some time now, Greater Wellington has had a vision of a *sustainable region*. This Plan shows how we will continue to contribute to achieving sustainability. It sets out the outcomes we are trying to achieve and our planned work programmes – as well as the cost. Just as importantly, it shows who we will be working with – because we cannot do it alone. Sustainability requires shared effort and effective working partnerships.

Sustainability is one of the most important challenges facing our society today. Issues such as increasing energy costs, climate change, water supply, environmental threats, social equity and economic growth are at the forefront of today's political concerns, both in New Zealand and worldwide.

While the challenges are clear, the solutions at a regional level are not easy to pin down – and then there is the need to balance what we'd like to do with what is affordable. This Plan is the result of much work and debate, both within and outside Greater Wellington. For Greater Wellington, a *sustainable region* means ensuring our environment is protected while meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of the community. But in preparing this Plan, councillors also put much thought into "how" we are going to work, as well as into "what" we are going to do. To this end we developed the following themes to assess the appropriateness of our planned work programmes:

- . • Working as a region
- . • Doing what we do well
- . • Being innovative and visionary
- . • Working **with** and **for** the community.

Councillors also faced a new challenge when preparing this ten-year Plan. The Local Government Act 2002 permits regional councils to engage in new areas of activity if those activities meet the needs of the community. We were requested to fund some new areas of work. However, after careful consideration, councillors decided to focus on maintaining and improving existing programmes rather than branching out into new areas.

In the proposed Plan, the Council specifically sought the community's views on some major strategic decisions that needed to be made before the Plan was finalised. The feedback we received was excellent and is discussed further below.

We were delighted to receive 411 submissions on the proposed Plan. Thank you to all those who took the time to contribute to our long-term plan. Each submission was carefully considered and, as a result, changes have been made for the final Plan. Some of the points and issues that were raised in submissions could not be addressed immediately as they warrant in-depth discussion. The Council will certainly be following up on these issues.

Improving public transport

A year ago Council sought the community's views on some major funding increases needed to maintain and improve public transport in the region. The response was that we should go ahead with the increases. Those transport improvements are included in this Plan and are the main reason for the rates increase.

As well as increasing rates to pay for improved transport in the region, we will also be increasing passenger rail fares by 15%, effective from September 2006, so costs will be spread fairly across all ratepayers and fare paying passengers. This will be the first increase in rail fares for four years..

Public submissions focused on two key issues: first, our target on the percentage of work trips made using public transport did not appear to be ambitious enough; secondly, ensuring that

our services run to timetable should be the highest priority. We recognized that the target concerned was not as clear as it should be – and it has been amended in this final plan. Current growth in all transport trips in the region is forecast to continue at around 4% per year. So even maintaining public transport's share will require us to increase patronage – which will be a major challenge and require significant investment to make services more attractive to users. This Plan provides for that investment. Currently our job is being made easier by rising petrol prices as more people are turning to public transport. Our challenge is to provide sufficient capacity to meet the growing demand and to maintain the quality of our services so that public transport is the mode of choice over the long term. Council will need to monitor constantly the situation. During the next 12 months a comprehensive review of investment priorities will be carried out to maximize service reliability and meet anticipated demand.

A major commitment to flood protection across the region

Greater Wellington has already committed to a forty-year programme of major flood protection improvements in the Hutt Valley and Kapiti Coast. However, recent floods have generated requests from affected communities to speed up this programme of works – and even expand it to cover some smaller rivers and streams. In the Wairarapa there is also a demand for improved flood protection.

This Plan provides for acceleration of the Hutt Valley works and for new expenditure in the Wairarapa. Kapiti Coast works will continue as planned.

This will mean increased costs for the communities who will benefit directly, as well as for ratepayers across the region. This was fully supported by submissions on our proposed Plan.

Expanding our parks network

Greater Wellington has five regional parks and has signalled in the past that it would like to expand the network to provide more areas for public recreation across the region. This Plan provides for a wetland regional park in the Wairarapa and for a regional park at Whitireia, Titahi Bay. Adding these new parks to the network means additional costs for ranger services, infrastructure, such as signage and tracks, and general operating costs associated with managing land. These additional services mean an additional 1% on the rates in 2007/08. Meanwhile, it is business as usual in our existing parks.

Greater Wellington has already committed to the purchase of the Waitangirua block which will become part of the Belmont Regional Park.

Those submitters that commented on the parks were largely supportive of our approach. Some favoured the inclusion of Whareroa to our parks network. But the issue of whether this Council should have a role in the management of Whareroa is still being discussed.

Water conservation measures versus a new water source

We collect, treat and deliver water to the cities of Lower Hutt, Porirua, Upper Hutt and Wellington. At current estimates of population growth, we will reach our supply limit within two to three years. Some enhancements, costing up to \$6 million, will provide a solution for a few years. Consequently, this Plan provides for investigative work on a major new water source, potentially costing up to \$102 million. We will have the costs refined in about a year.

However, if people reduce their water consumption, a new water source may not be required so soon – or perhaps not at all. The water supply growth rate is about one percent a year, so reducing consumption by one percent a year through using water more wisely will put off the need for a new water source.

This issue generated widespread interest from submitters, with most advocating for increased effort in promoting water conservation. Submitters stopped short, however, from supporting the full use of water metering to reduce demand. The Council is preparing a comprehensive Water Management Plan in conjunction with the four cities. This will cover new conservation initiatives. At the same time, as the region's population grows, it is prudent to prepare for a new source should it be needed in 10, 15 or even 20 years time.

Other issues raised

During the consultation process, a range of other issues were raised in submissions and the Council has addressed a number of these in the final Plan. A number of submitters called for clarification of programmes and clearer signals of intent. Concerns raised about action and leadership on the implications of climate change will be addressed in the review of the Regional Policy Statement. How the Council proposes to address biodiversity issues has been made more explicit in the Plan, and greater clarity has been provided on the development of an integrated catchment management approach. We will be carrying out some scoping work on integrated catchment management and, when this has been completed, Council will be reviewing the way it is resourcing its land and water management programmes. In the meantime, this Plan provides for the continuation of our existing services.

Several submitters called for a clearer strategic direction from the Council with some asking for us to be bolder and give greater meaning to sustainability and a sustainable region. We thought that these points were entirely valid and the Council is committed to seeing how we can do better.

Indeed, a recurrent theme of our public consultation was a call for Greater Wellington to take a more transparent

and active leadership role on regional issues. The Council intends to take up this challenge and lead the debate on transport infrastructure, water supply and land management issues in the region. We also intend to take a more active role in sustainable economic growth under the framework of the Wellington Regional Strategy, particularly the integration of economic development, transport services and land use planning. All of this will be in collaboration with local authorities, central government agencies and the business community.

The Wellington region is poised for an exciting future. Greater Wellington will fully contribute to this future.

Ian Buchanan
Chairman