

# Local Government: A sector perspective

Eugene Bowen  
Chief Executive, *Local Government New Zealand*



**Local Government New Zealand**  
*te pūtahi matakōkiri*

## ***What was the problem again?***

**The Commission was tasked with developing "local government arrangements....to maximise, in a cost-effective manner...the current and future wellbeing of the region and its communities**

**Problems identified as.....**

- regional governance is weak and fragmented**
- community engagement is poor**

**Other problem descriptions**

- a lack of clarity of division of responsibility**
- messy and inefficient urban growth**
- infrastructure constraints**
- social disparity**
- poor urban design**

## *The public describe the symptoms as...*

**Public transport is poor**

**Roads are congested**

**Planning applications are slow and expensive**

**Rates are high**

**Councils fail to agree on important issues**

**Councils do not listen to the people**

**The city and waterfront are run-down and unattractive**

## *Other parts of the problem*

### **Systemic funding issues**

- **Over-reliance on rates to fund infrastructure (NZ-wide)**
- **Decision-making on rates disconnected from operating and asset realities**

### **Inconsistent government policy (e.g. regional fuel tax)**

### **The extent to which government agencies work together in planning and services delivery**

### **How government agencies connect and interact with local government**

## ***Key characteristics of the proposed solution***

**A large metropolitan unitary**

**A stronger mayor**

**Statutory corporatisation of transport and roading; water and waste water**

**A single spatial plan**

**Greater council-agency integration in allocating social services**

**Community boards with greater powers (*but greater than what?*)**

## *Other issues and factors*

**Consultation – public debate on the quality of the process**

**Asset management and ownership – councils should retain discretion in selecting the best solution**

**Regional Transport Authority and local roads – roading networks or community values?**

**Social Issues Board – a discussion needed at the national level**

**Urban development – alignment with the mandatory spatial plan to be developed by Auckland Council**

## *Some caveats*

**Statutory corporatisation of the major networks could hinder integration**

**Unitary models exist elsewhere in NZ, but**

- **Currently environmentally focused**
- **Separate cooperative regional models for transport, economic development, tourism**

**Virtuous democratic and citizen-based models exist for amalgamation – the case for centrally initiated amalgamation needs careful persuasion to community level**

## *Fewer councillors, bigger councils*

**NZ currently has a relatively high ratio of citizens to their elected representatives**

**High ratios are associated with:**

- **Low voter turnout**
- **Lack of recognition and engagement between citizens and representatives**
- **Lack of responsiveness and accountability**

**Fewer councillors – UK 1:2600, New Zealand cities 1:7570, Auckland now 1:21000; new Auckland 1:63000**

**Statutory corporatisation – NZ already world-leaders in asset management**

## *A design brief for the second tier*

**that the proposed second tier of governance has sufficient discretion and influence on the outcomes directly affecting communities to persuade communities to constructively engage in and support the processes of local democracy**

**that the linkages between rates paid and local outcomes are sufficiently visible to satisfy communities**

**that the large upper tier (the Auckland unitary) is freed up to concentrate on the future of the Auckland city region while communities have the scope to preserve their unique identities and to retain their sense of place**

## ***The implications for the wider local government sector***

### **A unitary metropolitan council**

- **Amalgamation and boundary alignment**
- **Transferred responsibility for environmental management**
- **An expanded role in economic development?**

**Other councils may want to use this opportunity to initiate change – Government signalling the initiative rests with councils and their communities**

**Consultation on change outside Auckland impossible in time for 2010**

**Our advice – *see if Auckland works first!***

## *Conclusion, for the rest of New Zealand?*

- **The call for change must remain with councils and their communities, based on sound problem definition and robust and transparent consultation of the full range of solutions**