



To Dean Kimpton, CEO Auckland Transport

c.c.

Mayor Wayne Browne, Deputy Mayor Desley Simpson, Chair of AC Transport Committee

John Watson, Councillor Mike Lee

Waitematā Local Board - Genevieve Sage, Greg Moyle, Anahera Rawiri

Minister of Auckland Michael Wood

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Importance of Business Improvement District (BID) Liaison Positions

Introduction & background

The Parnell Business Association represents over 1,100 businesses and more than \$2.2 billion in capital value. We are very concerned about the news that the BID Liaison team within Auckland Transport could be disestablished, and would consider this a huge step backwards in our relationship with this very important CCO. There is no CCO that has more impact on our town centres than Auckland Transport, from footpaths to roads and cycleways. Over the years, this has often had very negative repercussions.

- Up to 2015, the BIDS and residents' associations used to have a liaison person, who was 'geographically' focussed and would provide information on upcoming projects etc and would assist in navigating the organisation. This process worked very well.
- From 2015 there was a team from AT that supported local boards but not BIDS. This absolutely did not work, and it was during that time that the BIDS' relationship with AT deteriorated significantly. BIDS were largely excluded as stakeholders and all communications were supposed to be via local boards. This whole process did not function as intended and varied across the region as some local boards did not keep their BIDS duly informed and the BIDS had little or no input into AT. Even if Local Boards did loop in the BIDS adequately, the arrogant stance from Auckland Transport, was that we held no standing as key stakeholders.
- In 2017 and 2018 as frustration with the process described above increased across the BIDS, meetings were held between BID representatives and the CEOs of the Council CCOs including Stephen Town, Shane Ellison, and Nick Hill.
- In June 2018 the BID representatives met with Wally Thomas to discuss key issues, asking for the BID Liaison roles to be re-introduced.
- In 2020 BIDS participated in the CCO review which saw a great deal of negative feedback given regarding AT as the relationship with BIDS was still very poor.



- Around the same time AT appointed **Stephen Rainbow** and attached is his report and recommendations to the AT board (AT and its relationship with BIDS). This still stands, as his report eventuated out of discussions with several BIDs.
- We believe that the Auckland Transport BID Liaison team as it has grown under Stephen, has improved our relationships with AT tremendously. We have found the BID Liaison personnel (Caroline Tauevihi and Michael Richardson) to be immensely helpful, not only in navigating the organisation, but also in providing early information regarding processes or intended projects, which has certainly taken the 'sting' out of some of the issues for our members and also facilitated providing AT with some useful local community feedback.
- Collectively, we do not believe that we can support AT or our members as effectively and efficiently moving forwards without this team, the individuals within it and their positive and successful relationships with the BIDs who are key stakeholders of AT.

We do acknowledge the difficult situation that Auckland Transport (AT) finds itself in with the need to reduce operating costs because of the significant budget shortfall of \$295 Million projected in the Auckland Council Annual Budget 2023/2024.

But we sincerely ask that Auckland Transport **DOES NOT** disestablish the Business Improvement District (BID) Relationship Management / BID Liaison positions established in 2019. **These engagement roles have significantly reduced confusion, enabled BIDs with a clear pathway to get issues addressed and provide a single contact point to raise emerging concerns.**

Maintaining these positions is vital as they support a mutually beneficial relationship between AT and the current 50 BIDs for the following reasons:

- (1) BIDs are important key stakeholders
- (2) The cost benefits from involving BIDs early in the decision-making process
- (3) BIDs provide a communications and engagement platform for AT for the dissemination and receipt of information important to business
- (4) The correlation between transport, business, and economic development
- (5) BID/AT Liaison successes



(1) BIDs are important key stakeholders

The current 50 BIDs are spread across the Auckland region and are critical stakeholders for AT as they represent 25,000+ businesses whose employees need to travel via some mode of transport to access their place of work.

Additionally, the BIDs have access to all these businesses and their employees, enabling important local community feedback to be sought and provided to AT on any number of large scale or smaller projects. This results in greater engagement and transparency in the process for any proposed projects shared with the BIDs.

(2) The cost benefits from involving BIDs early in the decision-making process

Involving BIDs in discussions regarding proposed projects, particularly large-scale projects such as the recent major changes on Karangahape Road, is vital from a cost benefit perspective. Any early engagement with the BIDs ensures that feedback from the local business community regarding the practicalities and effects of any project is factored into conversations from the outset, This enables time and money to be saved by supporting the cost saving mantra of ‘do it once – do it right’.

(3) BIDs provide a communications and engagement platform for AT for the dissemination and receipt of information important to business

Providing a communications platform for AT to disseminate and receive information is a critical aspect of these BID Liaison positions. This not only helps to provide the BIDs and their members with the necessary information upon which to base their fully informed feedback, but as noted above, it also supports AT to engage more effectively with the local business community, thus offering a more transparent process around any project consultation.

(4) The correlation between transport, business and economic development

Local and regional economic development is vitally important to Auckland, particularly following the well-documented economic challenges that the city and businesses have faced during and post the pandemic. There is an obvious correlation between transport, business, and economic development. Transport is a vital link - bringing patrons to businesses and other economic activities such as events, then moving some of the same patrons from one economic activity to another.



This is a win-win situation as the resulting financial growth then provides more opportunities for an increase in business and other economic activities, which is a win for business and the development of Auckland. These opportunities, in turn, attract more patrons on AT services, providing increased income and so the cycle continues to everyone's benefit!

(5) BID/AT Liaison successes

Recently we have been dealing with **Michael Richardson** on **The Strand Optimisation**. He has really been super helpful in identifying key issues affecting our members, and managing the project team from Waka Kotahi and Auckland Transport to address these issues. This project had the possibility of eliciting a really bad response, following so shortly after the January floods, and his strategic handling of the stakeholders involved has certainly assisted in calming things down.

Over the years, Auckland Transport has been very inconsistent with giving BIDs the heads up – sometimes this is at the inception of projects, other times it is just before the project commences. We have worked with **Caroline Tauevihi** on several occasions, who has assisted with AT project teams, late notification plans, overbearing and ill-considered traffic management plans etc.

I think it should be noted, that in our opinion, this is not just a communication role – the value of both persons above is understanding that strategic importance to all parties.

Conclusions

We acknowledge that AT needs to carefully consider the decisions being made to make the operational savings required of the organisation, but we ask that the disestablishment of the BID Relationship Management / BID Liaison positions are not deemed necessary to achieve the requisite savings target.

We fundamentally believe that for the reasons identified above, maintaining these positions will provide greater financial and other non-financial benefits to AT versus the upfront spend invested into these positions.

Kind Regards
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Auckland Transport and its Relationship with BIDs

Background

Auckland Transport's capital works projects are at the cutting edge of the current transformation of Auckland. Because of the large number of capital projects, especially in commercial areas, AT has identified the need to better engage with business stakeholders including through its Statement of Corporate Intent. Of particular concern to AT is the disruption to business caused by construction activity and the need for enhanced communications during periods of disruption caused by disruption.

Auckland Transport's Statement of Intent explicitly states that "Auckland Transport acknowledges that it can improve its engagement, communications and consultation and is committed to doing so. Many of the planned projects in the RLTP will require major changes to the road network and how it is used...As Auckland Council's delivery agency for transport services and projects, Auckland Transport needs Council's ongoing support and commitment. This includes the well informed backing of Council, ward councillors and local boards, particularly in circumstances where Auckland Transport is delivering transport system investments which are high priority for Council, but which will not be popular with some stakeholders, businesses and community members". Issues of communications and engagement are central to the current Review of CCOs being undertaken by Auckland Council, and nowhere is this more relevant than in dealing with businesses, especially where construction disruption is occurring.

The Mayor's 2019 Letter of Expectation to Auckland Transport explicitly also called for improved communication with business communities.

The significance of business stakeholders to Auckland Transport has subsequently been explicitly communicated by the Chief Executive (July 2019): "I want us to be more consistent in our dealings with businesses and to recognise the need for us to work more closely with them when we are planning any works that could impact or disrupt their business".

Auckland Transport is now devoting increased resources to its relationships with business stakeholders, not only because they are vital partners in AT's delivery of its capital works, but because AT recognises that Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Business Associations that administer them represent 25,000 businesses that make an estimated \$24billion contribution to the Auckland economy.

There are 48 Business Associations in Auckland that raise "targeted rates" within their BID areas to be spent on local improvements. A number of these BIDS have been engaged with in the preparation of this report, and a presentation made to the Council's BIDs network, with an update planned for February. There are some consistent themes that BIDs make in their feedback about their relationship with AT.

Business Expectations of AT

In the course of meeting with BIDs, they have expressed that:

- AT needs to appreciate the role of BIDs
- BIDs want AT's projects to succeed
- BIDs know their areas better than anyone
- AT needs to involve BIDs early-on in the planning and delivery of projects
- There's a need for better coordination of work across AT and Council
- More and better communication between AT and BIDs is needed
- Open and honest in communication from AT is required
- Even once projects are underway there's a need to constantly answer the "why", i.e. to "tell the story" of why change is occurring
- A single point of contact for BIDs at AT is needed

Key Issues

It is very easy for any report to focus on critical feedback. However, there is by no means a singular view of AT from business stakeholders. Favourable feedback from BIDs was not unusual. One Business Association, for example, stated that they enjoyed working with AT: "It's so much easier and better than working with Auckland Council". Others high-lighted how much their relationship with AT had improved significantly from where it had been.

There were areas that were raised with a degree of consistency however, where improvements can be made.

The Need for a Consistent Approach to BIDs by AT

There is no consistency of approach to dealing with BIDS (and the business associations - BAs- that administer them) by AT. Some BIDs have a relationship with AT's Elected Members Liaison Team while others do not. This is in part because some BIDs have good relationships with their Local Boards, while others do not. In other cases, BIDs may be at odds with their Local Boards. BIDs may also cover areas that are administered by more than one Local Board. Issues around the hierarchy of governance and the complex relationships between Local Boards and BAs need to be put to one side. **AT needs to recognise that BIDs are key stakeholders, and that a consistent approach to BIDs will be taken, akin to the approach to Local Boards, for example.**

This agreed approach will require AT resourcing. The resource could enable the work of existing Elected Member Liaison Team members to cover BIDs or provide a dedicated resource to manage BIDs. There is a need for at least one dedicated resource to fulfil this role, but a geographically-based model with a BIDs manager in each of the south, north, central-east and west may present the optimal model over time.

A geographic or place-based model of engagement with BIDs would enable a situation where the BID relationship manager, the Elected Member Liaison manager and the local BID could sit down together and work how changes can be implemented in a location like St Heliers, for example, in a way which is likely to achieve the best result. Such an integrated model of delivery could potentially avoid some of the pitfalls that have befallen AT projects to date where BIDs have either been ignored or involved too late in the delivery of projects.

There is a Need for a Single Channel for BIDs to access AT

The need for consistency also applies to the channels for BIDs to access AT. Some BAs have positive relationships with AT because of a single person in the organisation -like Chris Martin with GETBA (Greater East Tamaki Business Association) or Dylan Smith with Ponsonby and Newmarket Business Associations. These individual contacts serve as conduits for a range of issues that has created a sense from BIDs that AT is accessible and responsive. Other BAs, however, report that they struggle with knowing who to contact at AT. Some BIDs use the Call Centre, others the website, and yet others Local Boards, as their channels into AT. "AT's complaint process is not great" North Harbour's Sarah de Zwartz reported, and she insists on logging and recording all complaints so she can keep track of them as she often needs to chase up responses.

The creation of a single point of contact at AT for the BAs is recommended. Not only will this signal to BIDs that their concerns are taken seriously, but it will ensure their issues are captured in a systematic way. Currently there is no consistent approach to the management of BIDs concerns, and successful relationships have evolved more by accident than design. It is therefore essential that the management of the relationships with the BIDs should be formalised at AT, and a consistent approach developed.

Auckland Council has also been investigating the possibility of a single channel for BIDs to access Council.

The Importance of "Wider Conversations"

A consistent theme from BIDs is their frustration about how to engage with AT on "wider conversations" about the future of their areas -and the role of transport in that. If businesses want one thing it's certainty, but at present there is no sense that BIDs can engage with AT on getting clarity about the future of their areas. "Who're the people in AT with an 'umbrella overview'?" asked one BA, while another asked "Who can we sit own with and do a transport audit of our area, particularly around congestion and parking issues, on a regular basis?".

There is a sense that AT's interventions are ad hoc and uncoordinated, with some BIDs reporting that they have acted as conduits for coordinating activities across AT that different "silos" within AT have not themselves been aware of. BIDs are expected by their members to have a broad overview of the things that are happening or planned in their areas but getting a joined-up approach from AT about actions in BID areas is often difficult. Instead BIDs often report -as with pedestrian crossings in Davis Crescent, Newmarket, for example- that different parts of AT are undertaking work unaware of what other parts of the organisation are doing in the same space. It can be a challenge even to get joined up thinking within AT, but BIDs expect this, and a geographic-based approach to managing ATs relationships with BIDs will make this more likely.

In Onehunga the issue is a broader one as Panuku rolls out significant town centre stages which cannot be separated from transport issues, but with the Onehunga Business Association struggling to obtain a "joined up" Council view of the combined impacts of the council family's plan for their area. Similarly, the Uptown Business Association is focussed on the post-CRL transformation of their neighbourhood, but unclear about where the joined-up Auckland Council-AT vision is for the area's re-development and who the "one throat to choke" at AT is. Parnell Business Association has recently been involved in the creation of a Parnell Plan, outlining a future vision for Parnell. Their question is how to engage with AT to promote the plan and to make sure it's taken account of in AT project delivery in Parnell?

Recommendation: AT to arrange an ongoing programme of engagement with BIDs where "wider conversations" about AT's work in local areas can be undertaken -as currently happens with Local Boards

The Importance of Parking

No other issue is more important in the “wider conversations’ that BIDs expect than parking. The Karangahape Road Business Association (KBA) is just one BID that has constantly sought to engage AT in a “wider conversation” about parking as the upgrade project unfolds, but they are far from alone in having parking as an important -if not the most important- issue (witness agitation from certain elements of the Ponsonby Road Business Association in the run up to Christmas). Parking will need to be a key element of the “wider conversations” which the dedicated AT BIDs resource will be responsible for facilitating with BIDs. At present there are pressing parking issues from Orewa to Wiri, and a desire from business that parking plans are developed more widely than currently exist. In the meantime, there’s much positive feedback about the responsiveness of parking officers in dealing with immediate issues.

The story of parking is a key component of the wider AT story, and engagement on parking issues is one of the ways to reassure businesses that there is a coherent joined-up AT approach to managing Auckland’s ongoing growth.

Helping Businesses to be AT’s Allies – the Importance of Communications

BIDs are critical to AT’s ability to deliver its capital programme across the city but they can only successfully support AT’s efforts if communication is early, consistent and ongoing (especially during the construction of projects). BIDs consistently report that they want AT’s projects to succeed. This involves early engagement of BAs, drawing on their local knowledge to shape and design projects (including insights into affected stakeholders).

Some BIDs report that they have only been engaged once problems occur, whereas had they had been involved earlier they could have helped AT to avoid certain pitfalls. Early engagement by AT with so BAs are not caught by surprise -including angry members who expect their BIDs to criticise AT, often publicly) was one of the consistent requests from BAs.

In cases where project architecture is well planned beforehand with a clear structure including a stakeholder management plan, things go much better than when BAs are engaged late in the delivery of projects. BIDs need to be included consulted early in the development of projects, and consistently engaged throughout construction. This requirement will sometimes fall to the contractors, in which case AT must be explicit in its contracts -as in Karangahape Road- of the expectations it has of its contractors with regard to sustained engagement with businesses and their representatives.

In addition, there is a need for a consistent approach to development response once projects are underway. The relationship between AT and Auckland Council in this regard can be opaque, and there are ongoing challenges with Council’s “leadership” of projects once they are underway. The vacuum that this creates has the potential to provide opportunities for negative coverage of any construction disruption (or even of the entire project, with issues of parking removal and cycleway construction regular sources of antipathy towards AT).

Clarifying seemingly simple issues like who the spokesperson is for projects once they’re underway needs to be established at the outset of construction, especially where projects have a high-profile (e.g. Karangahape Road).

AT needs to require a consistent approach to the allocation of resources to support ongoing communications and stakeholder engagement with all significant delivery projects. AT also needs to exercise a leadership role in coordinating activities that may involve non-AT parties. From business’s perspective, for example, the disruption caused by CRL in Karangahape Road is inseparable from the K Rd upgrade currently underway, yet CRL and the Link-Alliance have not so far presented a joined-up approach to dealing with the impacts that the BID is concerned about.

There are relatively simple steps that AT should consider in scaling up their communications with BIDs, including an e-newsletter tailored for business, and a mandatory component in regular Local Board reports covering off AT's engagement with BIDs.

Recommendation: In recognition that BAs are key stakeholders in the delivery of projects, all AT project management plans should be required to ensure adequate resourcing for ongoing communications, and for delivery response (in conjunction with Auckland Council).

Regional Variations

At present a few BIDs with relatively high-profile and active members receive a significantly greater amount of AT attention than other parts of the city with less active BIDs. For example, one southern business association said "We'll take whatever we get from AT... we're grateful for anything" whereas other parts of the city have different levels of expectation of AT and engaged members and communities who do not hesitate to speak out on matters of concern.

AT needs to be cognisant of the make-up of the stakeholders in different parts of the city and ensure that in less vocal parts of the city the needs of BIDs are recognised. Less vocal parts of the city may actually be more deserving of attention. The need for upgraded town centres, for example, may be even greater in some communities, as small businesses struggle to compete with new -or existing- malls. In other areas, Rosebank or Greater East Tamaki, for example, the economic contributions of these business areas are significant for Auckland as a whole, but alongside the more glamorous isthmus town centres their issues and concerns may not appear as high-profile in spite of their critical economic role.

Case Studies

Wiri



Wiri Business Association is an interesting example of a BID that covers an area that is administered by two Local Boards. They are also relatively unique in that they do not have a “town centre” at their heart. Instead they cover an area of nearly 680 square hectares -with another 180 sq hectares to be added- with some of the last large undeveloped industrial sites in Auckland. The WBA represents property worth \$3.8billion and encompasses an estimated 16,500 workers.

New businesses such as a supermarket chain distribution centre are currently being built, a single facility that alone is adding more than 350 carparks to an area where there are already significant traffic congestion issues. “Who can I talk to about these issues on an ongoing basis?” the WBA General Manager Audrey Williams asks, “We can get help with parking wardens when there’s a particular parking issue, but where’s the “big picture” parking plan for dealing with our increasingly congested area?”.

The Local Boards that cover Wiri do not have a particular “business” focus and the WBA struggles to know who to approach at AT to discuss how to deal with significant traffic congestion issues as their area grows dramatically. Given this area is an economic power house, and the future growth that will occur, the need for a clear channel to AT -not just for operational issues- is critical. A geographic-based approach is particularly significant here as even a Local Board-based model would not necessarily address the needs of an area that is covered by two Local Boards, neither of whom are particularly focussed on the needs of business.

Newmarket

The Newmarket Business Association (NBA) represents up to 3,000 members who own commercial property and/ or businesses within the BID boundary. In the past few years, from a retail and hospitality perspective, Newmarket has contributed around \$600m to the Auckland economy annually. In light of the recent re-opening of Westfield Newmarket and its increased footprint, the precinct is likely to break through the \$1 billion mark in the next 18 months.

NBA exclaims about the “remarkable change” that has occurred in its relationship with AT, referring particularly to the successful implementation of the opening of the new Westfield mall in Newmarket and the work of the Newmarket Response Project Team (NRPT). Only in April this year the NBA’s Mark Knoff-Thomas was publicly quoted as saying that: *“The sheer size of AT means they are the most unco-ordinated goliath that struggles to maintain communications within their own organisation let alone with key stakeholders”* but now he wants the NRPT rolled over so that it’s involved in the planning and implementation of the proposed changes to Broadway that will result from the Connected Communities programme –changes that without NBA buy-in and championing have the potential to be even more controversial (due to the replacement of on-street parking with bike and bus lanes) that will otherwise be the case.

The NBA has even prepared a draft strategy outlining their vision for Broadway, so keen are they to shape the change in their area and to be included in its planning and delivery. The NBA’s strategy document reflects their frustration at AT’s lack of a “birds eye” view of Newmarket, a problem exacerbated by the lack of a Council plan for Newmarket (the Local Board has been more interested in Parnell and Ponsonby, the NBA claim).

The NBA’s vision is consistent with AT’s objectives: “We want Newmarket to be the most optimised place for PT with readily accessible information available for all modes”, and they are enthusiastic about being involved as early as possible in the planning of all the substantive issues in their area.



Newmarket Business Association's Mark Knoff-Thomas, from outspoken critic of AT to praising how easy AT have been to work with in less than a year (after the successful coordinated management of the opening of the new Westfield Mall in Newmarket) The NBA sees the need for a geographic-based AT contact person to manage their relationship, a person they'd like to see with the authority to bring together different parts of AT and to escalate decisions that currently take too long to resolve (they have had to get the CE to intervene on several occasions on matters where there was unsatisfactory progress).

The Need for AT to Effectively Engage with BIDs Will Only Grow

Newmarket's "vision" is an example of BIDs have the potential to be ATs strongest allies in the delivering of projects. Their local expertise can feed valuable insights into the planning and delivery of projects. BAs also have the potential to disrupt projects if they feel they are not being treated as key stakeholders.

If this has been true to date the roll-out of the safer speeds bylaw through town centres, and the significant impact of Connected Communities projects across the isthmus over the the need for a consistent approach to the management of BIDs becomes even greater. Without a structured and proactive approach to the engagement of BIDs by AT the roll-out of these significant changes could result in significant opposition. BIDs need to be considered critical stakeholders in the evolution of these projects, with the earliest possible engagement so that AT "takes communities on the journey with us" as we roll out our safer speeds bylaw and Connected Communities programme.

Conclusion/Recommendations

- AT needs to mandate the whole organisation to treat BIDs as key stakeholders, in recognition of their critical role not just in the delivery of AT projects but also in sustaining Auckland's economic success
- A structured approach to managing the AT-BID relationship is required. Each BID needs to know who the "one throat to choke" (to quote one BA) at AT is. AT needs to devote resource to the management of this relationship, with at least one dedicated person to fulfil the role, but ideally one geographically-based person in each of the southern, central-eastern, north and western areas
- There is a lack of opportunity for "wider conversations" about AT's plans and visions that impact on BIDs, yet BIDs want to know what's happening in their areas. A programme of engaging BIDs on ATs vision and plans needs to be undertaken
- Foremost among the concerns of nearly every BID are issues about parking. There needs to be a concerted effort to integrate Parking Plans into the holistic place-based plans that AT needs to develop as centrepieces of their relationship with BIDs
- There is a need for a dedicated line for BAs to use to access AT about operational issues. Current conduits into AT are varied and diffuse.
- At needs to ensure BIDs are identified as key stakeholders when projects and plans are developed, and ensure BA input is invited early into the design of projects so that local expertise can be drawn on in the design and delivery of projects

- Adequate resourcing for both communications and Development Response, with clarity of roles and responsibilities, should be required as part of the detailed planning of all projects, at the earliest possible opportunity in project planning
- AT needs to explore how to support staff who deal with BIDs with appropriate training in dealing with stakeholders and potentially negotiations skills, for example
- At needs to explore how to provide staff with input from businesses so that there is an increased awareness not only of the importance of business to the city, but also how construction activity, for example, can impact on businesses
- AT needs to actively engage with and support the emerging BIDS-Manager Advocacy Group, who have offered to act as a “sounding board” for BIDs and AT