Submission of the Wellington Residents' Coalition on *Infrastructure for a Better Future*

Introduction

The Wellington Residents' Coalition, which was formed in1997, has the

aim of protecting and and promoting the concerns, rights, assets and services of and for the residents of Wellington City.

Principles

The Wellington Residents' Coalition works on the following principles:

- services to the public should be provided directly by publicly-elected bodies; and
- services and infrastructure should generally be paid for by taxation (value-based rating for local authorities) rather than user charges.

Charging

While the aims of this discussion document may seem good the proposals on pricing are contradictory.

On the one hand the document emphasises the importance of people and on the other it suggests user charges (and recognises that such charges could have adverse effects on low-income people).

There is a school of thought that charging does not necessarily lead to reduced demand because those who are prepared to pay for goods and services charged for believe that having paid for them they are entitled to receive them. An example of this is a case of an Israeli childcare centre that started to charge parents for arriving late to pick up their children.

We therefore oppose proposals for user charging outlined in the document.

Water

The Coalition has developed a Residential Water Declaration

RESIDENTIAL WATER DECLARATION

Recognising that clean water is a taonga, and access to it is a human right,

And that water in New Zealand comes from rainfall which is free,

We oppose water metering and charges based on water volume use, as this is regressive and increases social inequality, instead preferring payment by a standard rates charge that is proportionally based on the value of the residence.

And we support conservation of water, by requiring that all water pipe repairs up to a residence are the responsibility of the water provider, and by relying on the solidarity of citizens to conserve water in the event of a temporary shortage.

Further, as access to water is a human right, the water provider must be a public asset that is directly accountable to the electorate.

The document states:

“Another option is to enable publicly owned water providers to charge water users directly for services and to enable volumetric wastewater charges for large wastewater sources. This would benefit the sector by providing clear revenue streams to fund infrastructure and encourage users to conserve water.“

Proposal C2.2 states:

“Enable publicly owned water providers to charge water users directly for their services and enable volumetric wastewater charges for large wastewater sources.“

The narrative in Wellington about potable water is that leaking aging pipes comprise a substantial part of the network and need to be fixed. We need water meters at all residences to identify leaks. This will cost $144 million. By helping to identify leaks it will reduce the amount of water lost by leaks. This will help put back the time when to meet population growth a third (expensive) storage lake is needed. We can then concentrate resources on replacing old leaking pipes in the distribution network.

If we look at the facts this above narrative is simply spin designed to move Wellington to a market for the supply and purchase of potable water as the allegedly the cost efficient means of securing supply into the future.

Total consumption of water in Wellington has not increased from its peak in 1990. Then consumption was 160 million litres per day. In 2020 it was 155 million litres per day. From 1990 the population has increased by 28%. It is unproven that future population growth will increase the total volume of water needed by an amount requiring the construction of a third lake. There may be other less expensive means of ensuring supply with a larger population.

Water meters at every residence will only assist in identifying the leaks that occur between the toby and the residence. How substantial these leaks are is unknown. Total water consumption by leaks, both public and private, is estimated to be anywhere between 7% and 30% of the total water volume. Anyone looking can find many leaks without the assistance of water meters.

Another issue is that leaks do not only result from aging pipes but also from excess water pressure.

A study in Auckland found that 70% of water consumption in households was for showers, toilets and laundry. These are utilities we all need. The amount of water used for these purposes can vary greatly depending on the water efficiency of the shower, toilet and washing machine. Old inefficient appliances can consume double what is required by water efficient appliances.

Rather than charging by volume for domestic drinking water, central and local government could encourage and/or regulate for the use of more water efficient devices such as water-conserving washing machines and dual-flush toilet systems.

We note also that there is no proposal to make better use of stormwater for non-drinking purposes. With higher density housing, stormwater runoff is likely to increase, so surely it makes sense to use some of this water for non-drinking purposes rather than having to build even bigger pipes to carry it away.

Our preferred approach to conserving water is