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Waitaki District Council submission on the Draft Aotearoa New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Document

Introduction

Waitaki District Council (WDC) welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Aotearoa New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Document.

The Waitaki district is in both the Canterbury and Otago regions. The district covers a large land area (7,152 km²) reaching inland from the Waitaki River mouth, up the Waitaki River Valley, through Ōhau to the top of the Ahuriri River Valley, extending south to Ōamaru, and down the east coast beyond Palmerston to Flag Swamp. The Waitaki district has a population of ~23,200 (2020). Ōamaru is the main town centre in the district with more than 50% of the district's population. Waitaki's economy is largely driven by primary production and tourism.

WDC makes the following points of submission.

Submission summary

WDC is a party to the combined the Canterbury Mayoral Forum (CMF) submission and is supportive of the Taituarā submission on this matter.

WDC supports the intent of the Draft Aotearoa New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Document.

Key points raised below include:

- The draft strategy is largely focused on infrastructure provided by central government
- Clarification is sought as to where "civic" infrastructure fits within the strategy, and what local government's role is in the provision and ongoing maintenance of "civic" infrastructure
- The issues and options addressed in the draft strategy focus on larger urban areas
- There is no prioritisation of actions in the draft strategy
- A centralised waste reporting system is key to monitoring waste minimisation progress, and clarification is sought around how the Infrastructure Commission will support the Climate Change Commissions target for carbon emission reduction
- Support for the development of a strategy and action plan to address the skills shortage of infrastructure professionals within the workforce
- Support for the collection and analysis of infrastructure data to create a national 'picture'

- Support to further investigate and consider alternative income streams in addition to rates to assist local government meet and fund future infrastructure needs (especially tourism)
- Support for low carbon transport options with more consideration given to the implications for sparsely populated rural areas of New Zealand eg. the Waitaki district.

Details on the above points are discussed below.

Comments

WDC wishes to make the following comments:

1. A focus on central government infrastructure

WDC is concerned that the focus of the draft strategy is on infrastructure provided by central government, with limited reference to local government. WDC supports Taituarā's submission comments that highlight the significant contribution that local government brings to the wellbeing picture across New Zealand. Local government provides and manages both "networked" and "civil" infrastructure (including parks, reserves and open space networks, swimming pools, community housing, museums and libraries).

- **WDC seeks clarification on where civic infrastructure fits within the draft strategy.**
- **WDC seeks confirmation that the provision and ongoing maintenance of "civic" infrastructure will remain a core responsibility of local government.**

2. A focus on larger urban areas of New Zealand

WDC notes that the issues and options identified through the strategy focus on the larger urban areas of New Zealand, with less emphasis on the provincial and rural areas. In the area of transport and waste management, this is especially evident eg. there is little reference to the impact of heavy vehicle uses on rural roads, forestry-related needs in the rural sector, and waste data sourced in the strategy has been averaged across the country and is not reflective of smaller towns.

- **WDC requests that rural sector issues are sufficiently represented in the national infrastructure strategy and action plan.**

3. Strategy integration and prioritisation of actions

WDC endorses Taituarā's comments through their submission that the draft strategy appears to be a collection of ideas, but lacks an overall coherence, and, no prioritisation of actions. The action plan is a 10 year one, but the strategy is a 30-year strategy.

- **WDC encourages an integrated approach across all agencies and work programmes to ensure that the strategy is well developed and avoids duplication.**

4. Waste – shared facilities, reporting and meeting targets for reducing carbon emissions

WDC notes that the variance in waste facility models and scale across the country makes it challenging to consider shared waste facilities. For example, Council facilities are based on

a cost recovery model with a strong focus on the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle, and serving the local community. This differs to private models of waste management which are largely driven by profit, serve the shareholders of the company with less incentive for waste minimisation.

- **WDC recommends a national reporting system be implemented to measure progress with waste minimisation measures.**
- **WDC seeks clarification on how the Infrastructure Commission will support the Climate Change Commission's increased target of waste reducing carbon emissions from 15% to 40%.**

5. Capacity and capability of infrastructure workforce

WDC agrees that there is a need to identify and address skills shortages in the infrastructure workforce across New Zealand. Capacity and capability of the national, regional and local workforce is key to delivering wellbeing outcomes and to achieving the vision as set out in the draft strategy.

- **WDC endorses Taituarā's recommendation that a national skill strategy be prepared, including an action plan to address significant skill gaps within the infrastructure workforce.**

6. Data collection and monitoring – "a national picture"

WDC notes that data collection and reporting across central and local government is key to fully understanding the national infrastructure picture and allow the monitoring of progress.

- **WDC recommends that infrastructure data is collected and analysed to create a national picture.**

7. Alternative income streams to fund future infrastructure needs

The Waitaki district has a small rate-payer base with a large land area. WDC like other smaller local authorities continues to face financial pressure to meet community infrastructure requirements, and there is increasing demand for more infrastructure to support the growing tourism base. While the TIF has been a short-term solution to fund some capital projects, this fund is unlikely to resolve the infrastructure funding issue in the long term.

- **WDC is supportive of Taituarā's and CMF's submission to encourage further investigation and consideration of alternative income streams (other than rates) to assist local government meet and fund future infrastructure needs, particularly in relation to tourism eg. a tourism tax.**

8. Low carbon transport options

The key primary production sectors in the Waitaki district are largely inland, rural based businesses. They depend on reliable and efficient transportation infrastructure to get their products and services to market. The primary production sectors are primarily served by heavy vehicles on low volume roads. Rural communities regularly need to travel longer distances to access and fulfil their basic needs.

- **WDC supports CMF's submission around providing options for low carbon transport networks that take into consideration sparsely populated rural areas.**

- **WDC supports enabling active modes of travel as part of encouraging lower carbon footprints and assisting with wellbeing.**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the Draft Aotearoa New Zealand Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Document.

For any enquiries, please contact:

 Executive Officer – Waitaki District Council


Yours sincerely


Acting Chief Executive