

IAP2 Australasia 2018 Core Values Awards

NZ Transport Agency & Aurecon NZ Ltd.

Northern Corridor Improvements Project, Auckland – ‘Infrastructure’ and ‘Planning’ Categories

Design and consenting phase - engagement programme 2016-17

1. Objectives of the project and public participation

The Northern Corridor Improvements (NCI) project on Auckland’s North Shore is a NZ\$700-million multi-modal transport project that received Crown funding in 2014. It was identified for accelerated delivery through planning and statutory consenting processes, and is now under construction.

The project’s objectives were to help facilitate inter-regional travel as part of the wider Western Ring Route (Auckland’s strategic motorway system), improve access and resilience in the transport network, increase travel choices for the community and better link the growing population to its neighbours and local services. The project proposed a new motorway connection between the Northern Motorway (SH1) and Upper Harbour Highway (SH18), improved local road connections to the motorway network, included over 7kms of shared walking and cycling paths, along with an extension of the hugely successful Northern Busway between Constellation and Albany Busway Stations. See [here](#) for a map of what was planned in the project area.

Right from the early design optioneering and business case phase in 2015, the project team committed to best practice public engagement principles, as part of the NZ Transport Agency’s [commitment to great social and environmental outcomes](#).

In the 2016-17 pre-implementation design and consenting phase, with core design components now agreed, the Transport Agency and its consultants Aurecon NZ Ltd (Aurecon) then had the chance to increase this commitment to the highest levels of the IAP2 public participation spectrum, to co-create a sustainable design that would best suit the community’s need and achieve environmental outcomes.

The decision to genuinely empower, collaborate and involve mana whenua, key stakeholders and the community was seen as critical due to the highly complex and accelerated nature of the project. The NCI project had the potential to be a truly transformative project for the fastest growing area of the North Shore, due to its planned investment in the full range of travel choices across all modes - vehicles, buses, cyclists and pedestrians. Success would rely on the community taking up these options. However it would also have a significant impact on a huge number of community facilities, reserves, special environmental areas and private properties, due to the heavily urbanised and tightly constrained corridor in which it had to be built.

The team committed to putting public interests “at the heart of all decision-making”, and formalised an engagement strategy across all workstreams.

The key measures of success were seen to be:

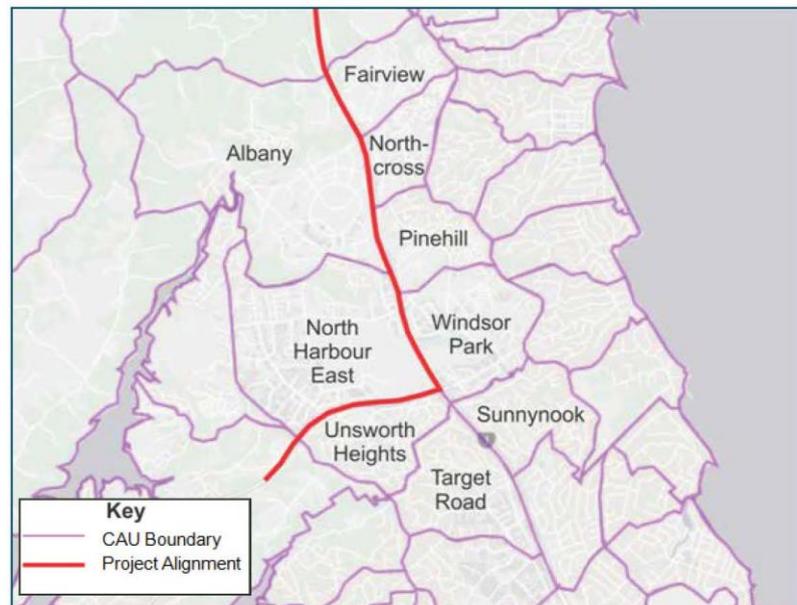
- 1) satisfaction with the proposed design, as evidenced by support and submissions at the project’s statutory consents hearing. Due to the scale of the project and its significance on a national level, the project was lodged with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in a Board of Inquiry (BOI) process, requiring it to demonstrate particularly rigorous processes; and

2) evidence of mana whenua, stakeholder and public participation influencing or changing decision making, alongside high levels of knowledge in the wider community.

2. Facing key challenges with a comprehensive strategy

Implementing an engagement strategy that would support such a complex project required significant effort, discipline and resource. The key fundamental challenge the NCI project faced was the sheer size and scale of the project and its varied range of stakeholders. The project zone is one of the busiest transport corridors in New Zealand, with almost 120,000 vehicles a day using SH1, and 40,000 vehicles using SH18.¹ Furthermore, over 5-million people used the Northern Busway during 2016 – 2017 and patronage is trending above expectation, with a 17 to 22 per cent growth over the past five years reported in 2017.

The motorway is surrounded on all sides by industrial businesses and residential homes. More than 130 individual properties and around 160 buildings were indicated as impacted or required by the project due to the need to widen the transport corridors. Eight residential suburbs neighbour the project area, each with distinct communities and challenges, including a number of ethnic communities with English as a second language. The country's fastest growing industrial area, North Harbour, is in direct



Source: NZ Statistics

contact with the project with more than 8,000 businesses belonging to the country's strongest business association and advocacy group, Business North Harbour. The wider project area is also home to a number of educational facilities including childcare centres, schools and the Massey University Albany Campus.

The second core challenge was the close inter-relationship of the project with the strategies and remit of a key partner, Auckland Transport (AT). In Auckland, all public transport services including bus stations, Park and Ride facilities, parking and bus services are operated and maintained by AT, as are the local walking and cycling paths. Once the NCI project gained approval for new infrastructure in these areas, ownership would then be transferred over to this arm of local government. This division of ownership and responsibility has always led to a level of confusion with the public and key stakeholders. Our response was to work together and always show a joint face to the public at all times, to avoid confusion and maintain a clear set of key messages.

The final major challenge for the project was that reaching a final design would involve the interplay of many moving parts, with the decisions and assets of other publicly-owned or community-run organisations needing to be timetabled and completed in between, in order to finalise project

¹ Average daily vehicles travelling in both directions from March 2015, taken from NCI Assessment of Traffic Effects

decisions. For example, the project would impact on more than 10-hectares of publicly owned reserves, recreation and open spaces, which required undertaking statutory processes under the Local Government Act and Reserves Act; it would also impact on a major sewerage treatment facility (Watercare) and a closed landfill area designated as high risk, contaminated land.

It also necessitated the relocation of a large and nationally significant sporting facility, North Harbour Hockey, which was located on Auckland Council owned land. The existing hockey facility consisted of three hockey turfs, a clubhouse and ancillary buildings, car parking and a football field. Following an extensive assessment process, the recommended option was to move the hockey facility to Rosedale Park north, which was the home to other community facilities including a BMX bike park and Rosedale Pony Club. The knock on effect of this relocation required significant stakeholder engagement and joint decision making. These decisions had to be made involving teams within Auckland Council, the Upper Harbour Local Board, local community groups and residents, with an intensive consultation process for over a year to investigate options, agree on suitable locations, and then go through the consenting approvals process to move each facility. In this particular case, public participation was at a 'collaborate' level where we joined forces with our partners to co-create and reach a mutually agreeable outcome.

Our response to these core challenges was to formalise an engagement strategy that all members of the project team 'signed up to' as part of their role, and to identify and prioritise any high risk stakeholder issues as early as possible. Our aim was to create working groups and agree resolutions with stakeholders and community members ahead of the Board of Inquiry consent process, rather than leaving items to be raised in a submission during the official public notification period.

3. Methodology

At the beginning of the concept design and consenting phase in early 2016, the project team and Aurecon implemented an Engagement Matrix, which assigned accountability and responsibility for consultation with all key partner, stakeholder and community groups across all senior project managers and workstreams, rather than just assigning this role to the Community Engagement team. The team then systematically identified all affected groups; the proposed level of participation on the IAP2 spectrum; and brainstormed opportunities and ways for engaging with them. The team then adapted a previous Multi-Criteria Assessment (MCA) tool used on other projects, adding Community/Stakeholder feedback to the tool's standard Social Impact criteria area and formalised how this would be measured and evaluated.

At the highest 'empower' and 'collaborate' levels, kaitiaki (environmental leaders) from all the registered iwi (Maori tribes) across the central and north Auckland region were engaged through the Transport Agency's Integrated Iwi Group (IIG) in monthly hui (meetings). As part of these hui the leaders were asked to nominate how they would like to work in partnership to ensure the principles of tikanga Maori (Maori custom and protocol) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship of the land and its environmental resources) would be considered in every aspect of the project. As a result, regular face-to-face hui and workstreams were implemented to investigate and agree options for best practice ecological and environmental measures across areas including stormwater treatment, maintenance and health of streams and planting regeneration. These agreed approaches were documented in the project's resource consent applications.

At the 'collaborate' and 'involve' level, local government partners at Auckland Transport, Auckland Council Parks & Recreation, the Upper Harbour Local Board and those key stakeholders identified in

the key challenge areas (for example, Harbour Hockey) were involved in steering committees and working groups to reach key decisions together.

At the 'involve' and 'consult' level, more than 85 key stakeholder groups such as Business North Harbour were brought into meetings and provided with information on proposals, alternatives and asked to provide feedback on how it might impact their interests. This also included utilities such as Transpower, Vector, and key local facilities such as QBE Stadium.

Business North Harbour also assisted with designing the best ways for industrial and business owners to be consulted and provide meaningful feedback. For example, due to the high percentage of owner-operators and small-to-medium businesses, early morning breakfast/coffee drop in sessions were deemed the best format to ensure those who found it difficult to leave their premises during the working day could attend.

Affected property owners were engaged at the 'consult' level of the spectrum and the NCI team committed significant resource to this workstream, including continuing to rent a local business office to ensure meetings could be held at their convenience in their neighbourhood, or offering to meet at an owner's property or present at a body corporate meeting. Multiple meetings were held with each property owner (and in many cases, multi-unit title holders and their tenants), and the NCI team proactively investigated the proposed impact on their business or home and discussed ideas to avoid or lessen the impact on key assets or the use of their site. In many cases, after listening to the concerns of property owners, the team was able to go back to the planners and design team to investigate reduction of the project's effects. For example, at several industrial sites, extra investigations confirmed how vehicles might still continue to circulate on site; and in another situation, successful consultation with the body corporate and apartment owners at an apartment complex resulted in the team being able to re-jig the design to avoid affecting a whole block of apartments, and their shared stormwater assets.

The wider residential community was engaged at a 'consult' and 'inform' level, where we sought feedback on the draft design elements to help shape the ongoing design process. Regular project [newsletters](#) were produced and distributed to over 48,000 homes and businesses, with information articulated in plain English and with easy-to-understand graphics and drawings. Surveys were included with a pre-paid envelope and with an option to respond online instead. The newsletter also contained instructions in Chinese, Korean and English about how to request a translated copy. An online E-newsletter of a similar nature was also distributed to a database of over 500 subscribers.

Open day information events were held regularly at convenient locations throughout the project area and at the local bus stations. The team also attended Massey University student events including during Orientation Week and have created regular stands within the university library area to inform and gather feedback from the student community.

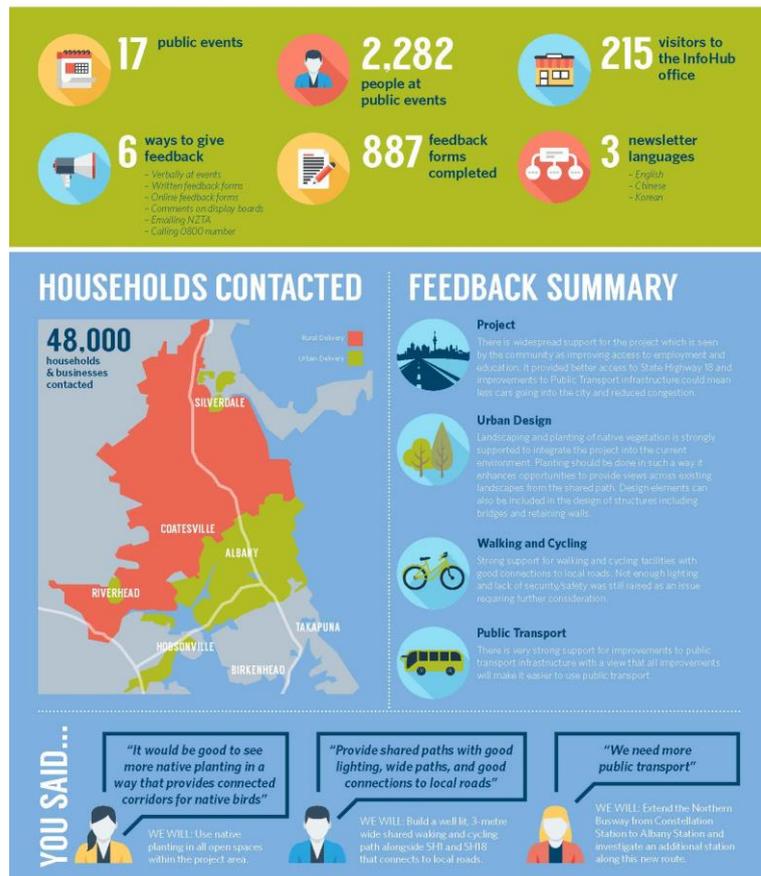
We also attended other groups' local community events, such as the Meadowood Community House Easter and Christmas events to connect with locals in the ethnically diverse community, along with a community planting day.

For those neighbours who would be potentially affected by the project, we designed a more personalised approach where we contacted each household with targeted communication channels, and outlined how they may be affected during construction – i.e. noise, vibration, and then offered an opportunity to meet with the team and technical experts to get some information on these effects. Meetings also took place with local community leaders who turned into ambassadors for the project and fed project information through to the wider community.

All feedback during this process was analysed and fed through to the planning and design teams for consideration in the Multi-Criteria-Assessment (MCA) tools. A good example of where public participation helped shape the planning process involved a key decision that had to be made to provide a proposed bridge link across the motorway, connecting the Unsworth Heights community to the industrial area around Omega Street in Rosedale. An independent survey and consultation process was developed to gather feedback from the local community. Our community ambassadors helped to spread the word and encouraged participation and attendance to the open day sessions. We listened and considered all feedback to decide that the bridge link would not be a positive or safe outcome for this community due to the sheer volume of traffic this link would attract into the quiet residential suburb, which our consultation showed was a key concern for most people. The community were notified of this outcome and were grateful to have been part of the decision making process.

Northern Corridor Improvements PUBLIC CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS

October-December 2014, July - September 2015, and June - August 2016



www.nzta.govt.nz/auckland-northern-corridor

Key to the success of the engagement strategy was the deliberate strategy to jointly consult with our project partner AT at all times, in recognition of the current customer confusion in Auckland over the different transport functions, i.e. management of the local road network vs the state highways/motorways. This meant there was rarely an instance where a member of the public was told that we could not provide an answer to a particular question, as many experts across the different transport sectors were involved with the project. The approach enabled us to immediately share information and feedback between the different organisations, and helped us to respond in a timely manner. Together, the two organisations consulted on the potential for a future bus station on the NCI Busway extension. In another instance, the team incorporated survey questions on specific AT projects into our own consultation surveys and open day events, to help AT make future decisions about parking and cycling facilities at other nearby bus stations.

Another good example of the project's focus on committing significant engagement resource to key challenges can be highlighted with the work investigating how to mitigate the impact on Harbour Hockey, the pony club and BMX facility. We developed a strategy to separate out this high-risk issue from the wider project and focus on extensive, weekly engagement with these stakeholders in a true partnership at the collaborate level of public participation. This involved the buy-in from CEOs

at Auckland Council and other stakeholder organisations, and the creation of extra workstreams and Steering Committees. We also developed a framework and agreement to collaborate on how external audiences and the memberships of each sports club were communicated with, to ensure each party was not just publicly representing or promoting its own interests. This was readily agreed to by all parties to reduce the risk of confusion for their members and the community during times of uncertainty. A clear set of key messages and one concise voice ensured we could reach the best outcome for all parties, whilst keeping the public informed at all times.

4. Innovation for cycling input

Reaching both current cyclists, as well as people who might be motivated to learn to cycle once new cyclist transport options were available, was a hard task that required its own special ‘consult’ level strategy. We broke down the options for cycling investment across all eight residential suburbs and each industrial area down into easy to read language and maps, where people could easily view their suburb at a detailed level, and see what was proposed in their neighbourhood. This information was then displayed in different ways on a special consultation website, where a special software package was able to host different types of feedback formats to make the information visually easy to understand, and quick and easy to respond to. People could also see other people’s comments, think about them and build upon them with their own on an interactive map, tagged to a location pin.

Walking and Cycling

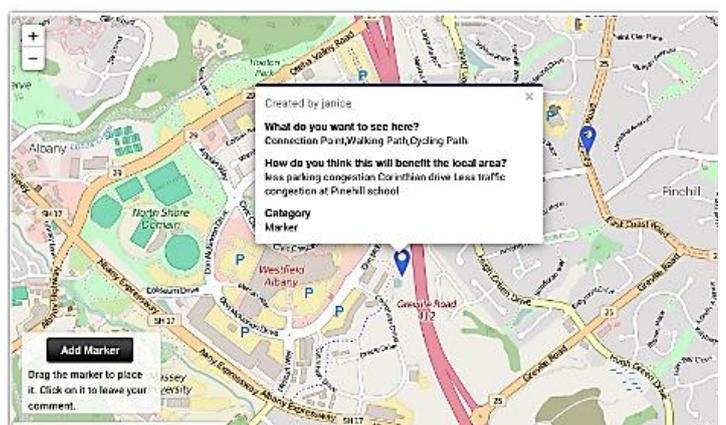
Add Marker and show us on the map below:

- Where would you like to see connection points to access these new shared paths and bridges?
- Where would you like to see more local walking and cycling paths?

The draft alignment plan also includes a new 5km shared walking and cycling path alongside the Northern Busway and SH1 all the way across and along SH18, joining up to the new cycle path on Albany Highway.

It is envisaged the shared path would be similar to the popular Northwestern Cycleway on the Northwestern Motorway (SH16). Auckland prioritised in the area to form a comprehensive network.

The first proposed connection will be the Spencer Road Bridge – a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the motorway, connecting the area and offering great views of Auckland City and Rangitoto Island.



Bike Auckland and other community cycling groups promoted the online survey via their social media networks to cyclists across the North Shore and beyond, and to schools and community facilities. Over 800 comments were received, which helped the team to plan and design the final cycle routes and connections.

A virtual reality simulation of the project’s key new cycling and walking bridge, Tirohanga Whānui (expansive view), was also developed to make the new piece of infrastructure more ‘real’. Using a headset, the simulation gave people the ability to feel like they were walking or cycling across the bridge, so they could appreciate its location and the access it could open up between the residential suburbs on one side of the motorway, and the retail/employment area on the other. The virtual reality equipment and goggles were portable so could be taken along to open days and meetings when required.

5. Closing the participation/feedback loop

Following each round of public participation, the NCI team “closed the loop” by advising all participants how their feedback had influenced the planning and design process. With mana whenua

and key stakeholders this is evidenced in meeting minutes and agreements negotiated before the Board of Inquiry process and tabled to the commissioners as part of this process.

For other community groups and the wider community, e-news and letters closed the feedback loop after each formal consultation milestone, and the project produced and published easy to understand graphics which outlined what the community had told us and how we have used this feedback to shape the project. An example of one of these graphics can be found [here](#).

6. Taking pride in our participants' satisfaction

The project team is immensely proud of the results of mana whenua, stakeholder and public participation in the NCI project's design and consenting phase.

Despite its size and the huge population base contacted through the phase, the project had an incredibly low number of submissions – only 33 in total. Comparable projects in New Zealand normally receive hundreds of submissions. And of those received, approximately 70% of all submissions were in support or partially in support. Only 2 submitters raised issues relating to the public consultation process.

Notably, key stakeholders including local government, road user groups, public transport and cycling groups were all in support. Unanimous support was also received from mana whenua.

In their final decision report, the independent commissioners who oversaw the official Board of Inquiry process noted:

"...overall the Transport Agency deserves credit for the way in which its consultation programme was designed and implemented. It has gone to considerable effort to engage with the public of Auckland generally and the key stakeholders in particular to inform them of what is proposed. There have been a great many opportunities offered to those potentially affected by the Project to engage with the Transport Agency to discuss matters of concern and, in some cases, to negotiate alterations to the Project. This can be seen particularly with reference to the fact that agreement has been reached with organisations such as Waste Management, Auckland Transport, Bike Auckland, Watercare, Vector, Transpower and Harbour Hockey Charitable Trust, and that the matters which were of concern to the Council are now reduced to one only."

The full Board of Inquiry final decision and report can be found [here](#).

A specific example of satisfaction from one specific stakeholder group is to look at the positive comments, media articles and blog items by cycling groups such as Bike Auckland, which noted on one of its blog articles:

"As advocates for everyday bike travel, we've always been concerned that big motorway projects (and this one is a four-year project worth \$700m) will simply add to motor vehicle traffic, while cutting communities in half, particularly for those who want to walk or cycle.

And, while the NCI project included a shared path from the beginning – a happy legacy of the battle for Waterview is that it's now standard practice for NZTA to thread paths for people alongside and across any new motorways – the question was always: would it be connected enough to be useful, and would those connections be safe enough to be attractive?

So, we're delighted that NZTA and the BOI itself have been communicative, pro-active and responsive to our requests to incorporate cycling facilities into the new motorway sections. Moreover, NZTA has also committed to working with Bike Auckland, Auckland Council and Auckland Transport to integrate bike improvements as best as possible into the surrounding greenways and street

networks. These improvements have been formally documented in a side agreement signed between NZTA and Bike Auckland.

With its focus on walking, cycling and public transport, this really is a multi-modal transport project for which NZTA deservedly gets a thumbs-up.”

The full post from the Bike Auckland website can be found [here](#).

The NCI project was also awarded the New Zealand Bike to the Future Award in 2017 within the “Taking the community on the journey” category for consultation during the development of the shared walking and cycling paths. This category covers excellence in communications or community engagement activities related to a cycling project that resulted in a community welcoming new infrastructure either in the planning and/or implementation stages of the project. An overview of the Bike to the Future awards and winning entry for NCI can be found [here](#).

Alongside this feedback, recounting the public participation process in its consenting application and referencing it in its MCA tools, the team is able to point to tangible evidence of its two original key measures of success and stand proud of its achievements.

The project is now looking forward to continuing this standard of engagement through to the project’s construction phase.