

Introduction

WSP welcomes the opportunity to participate in the consultation of the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission – Te Waihanga, 30-year Infrastructure Strategy for Aotearoa New Zealand.

The blueprint of Aotearoa is in our DNA. WSP has been partnering with the public and private sector to address the nation's infrastructure requirements for over 150 years. From the earliest roads and railways that connected our communities and regions, to the power stations that generated energy for the nation, and the airports and ports that connected us to the world.

We would like to acknowledge and congratulate Te Waihanga on delivering a comprehensive draft strategy and engaging in an open consultation process.

Understanding the past, where we are today and addressing the future infrastructure requirements of Aotearoa is critical to our economic, social and environmental wellbeing as a nation. We welcome the focus on developing a long-term strategy and infrastructure ecosystem, which better optimises the interplay between funding, the roles and policy settings of key institutions, and the critical partnership between the public and private sectors to deliver on this.

WSP believes the draft 30-year Infrastructure Strategy provides a strong foundation which, with further refinement and input through consultation, will produce a robust strategy and roadmap. We support the necessary focus on increased infrastructure spend to address historic deficits and keep pace with expected population growth. For Aotearoa, like many countries, delivering affordable housing, climate change adaptation and mitigation are imperatives we can and must address through a national approach to infrastructure. We are encouraged with the evolution in thinking on pipeline identification, reporting to Te Tiriti o Waitangi-led outcomes and investment principles.

Summary of key considerations and recommendations

The recognition of the need for institutional and governance reform including value capture and local government financing rules – such as depreciation and discount rates – will help address important issues such as funding and reducing timelines between concept and construction.

However, more detail is required to understand where accountability sits for delivering the strategy, measuring progress against it, and its ongoing evolution to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Like any strategy, it will only be effective if it is well implemented and backed with cross party political support and statutory teeth.

A national perspective and plan on growth

Aotearoa needs a national population growth strategy akin to Australia's population plan, released in 2019. This aims to underpin economic growth, reduce population pressures in major cities and support regions to attract the people they need. Aligning infrastructure strategy, funding and delivery with population growth – both planned and desired, will enable more robust infrastructure that meets existing needs, while taking account of future ones.

An understanding of New Zealand's population ambitions, whether we plateau at 6.8 million - as currently projected - or aspire to have a population of 10 million or more, will enable infrastructure decisions to support and fund it. We propose developing population, employment and demographic projections beyond the current 30-year window. Our population doubles every 50 years, and has grown at an average of 1.5% p.a since the 1970s. Large infrastructure projects currently take 20

years or more to come to fruition – typically resulting in 10 years’ headroom in the capacity they enable. We should consider building into our decision-making framework assessment of capacity needs based on longer term projections – at least 50 years.

There is considerable opportunity in developing a national spatial plan for infrastructure that can be funded and delivered against, with regional spatial plans feeding into this. It should set the vision for our country, our regions and cities. This approach will make it easier to prioritise funding and accelerate delivery of large-scale projects, some of which are currently experiencing difficulties in meeting delivery aspirations.

The current approach to infrastructure is characterised by communities and regions competing with each other for funding and scarce delivery resources resulting in duplication and inefficiencies. New Zealand needs to be competing with the world, not amongst ourselves, region vs region.

Creating a more integrated infrastructure ecosystem

Addressing this will require different roles, policy and funding settings than what exist today. For a country of circa five million, we have too many competing layers of institutions involved in the planning, funding and delivery of infrastructure.

The integration of infrastructure institutions should also focus on integrating organisations that provide the infrastructure (councils), with those that operate public transport on them (regional councils). This will enhance integration and ensure a common set of priorities to drive outcomes and use infrastructure more optimally.

We strongly support collaboration in strategy, planning and delivery of infrastructure across siloed government departments to deliver efficiencies. Procurement systems can be improved to be more consistent and more sophisticated, potentially even consolidated, which would refocus effort on outcomes for government agencies with delivery functions.

There is a definite need for a systems-thinking approach, where we acknowledge the dynamic interrelationship between our infrastructure sectors. Current infrastructure planning is often guilty of oversimplification, seeing transport and health as largely separate concepts, for instance. Systems thinking allows us to recognise the influence that each sector has on the other, and make decisions that optimise the whole, and should align to an outcomes-based infrastructure investment.

Tiriti Partnership and leveraging Te Ao Māori principles

Success in infrastructure and adherence to Tiriti principles, necessitate finding mechanisms which actively support a partnership with Māori. Likewise, incorporating Te Ao Māori principles can help ensure that infrastructure better addresses cultural, social, economic and environmental outcomes for all. Our national long-term infrastructure strategy must facilitate this, and the strategy as it stands is not explicit enough about this.

Ultimately, it needs the realisation that central and local government – including ministries, agencies and commissions – are a representation of the Tiriti Partnership.

Conclusion

Te Waihanga is to be commended on identifying some of the major infrastructure issues which we must address now and for the future. The consultation document articulates why Aotearoa has an infrastructure deficit and identifies some of the areas of action to help address it. However, we

agree that more must be done, and future imperatives necessitate a different approach to tackling infrastructure, notably one that takes a much more integrated longer-term perspective.

We encourage the continued discussion and debate around what New Zealand should look like for future generations and the key role long-term thinking and implementation of key infrastructure has in this.

WSP has been privileged to help shape New Zealand's infrastructure over the past 150 years and welcomes the opportunity to partner with Te Waihanga and the Government to plan and deliver for the next 150 years. Our mokopuna, and their mokopuna, depend on us to get this right and we are there to help support and drive this vision and ultimately the commitment to help make this happen.

Ngā mihi,



Managing Director – New Zealand

On behalf of WSP

wsp.com/nz