



SUMMARY OF WAIKATO MAYORAL FORUM MEETING MONDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2019

BROADBAND PROGRAMMES

Crown Infrastructure Partners provided an update to the forum on the rural broadband initiative phase two/mobile black spots fund and ultrafast broadband (UFB) programmes. In the Waikato region the total Crown Infrastructure funding for broadband is \$238.7 million.

Uptake in ultrafast broadband had been rapid, and in short periods of time, the forum heard – particularly in small towns which are only recently receiving access to UFB.

As a result of the programme, about 77 per cent of the population in the Waikato region will have ultrafast broadband. Government rural broadband programmes will cover another approximately 23 per cent, so there will only be about 0.3 per cent of the population that won't have broadband. Mobile blackspots were being addressed with the installation of 69 new mobile towers and new mobile coverage along 105km of state highway in the region.

The forum heard there were still some areas where work was to be completed – including on the Coromandel Peninsula and on the region's west coast. But the connectivity programmes are making good progress in the Waikato and the rural broadband initiative phase two/mobile black spots fund programme may finish a couple of years early.

WATERS UPDATES

Three Waters Review: The forum heard there are two phases of work which have been carried out and will be reaching a conclusion this year. Phase 1: Draft regulations. Phase 2: Service delivery.

Cabinet is expected to receive the recommendations on regulation changes in June, said Mayor Brian Hanna. He noted the complexities of the review, in that it crosses three ministries, and said the focus had appeared to move at the start of the year as a result of the high profile wastewater spills over summer which resulted in the closure of popular Auckland beaches.

The forum also heard that surveys were being carried out by the DIA, with a focus on compliance. The results will primarily help design the regulations.

Waikato Regional Council CE, Vaughan Payne, said a report had already been prepared on the affordability of wastewater treatment plants to comply with national standards. A similar report is being written around wastewater discharges into the coastal environment. But the reports don't identify how much wastewater discharges contribute to water quality, he said.

My Payne said there were a number of Waikato Mayoral Forum members who attended a National Party caucus meeting in February where they had about a dozen speakers present a full spectrum of views around three waters to help guide their response later this year.

Essential Freshwater Programme: The forum heard that a draft National Policy Statement and Environmental Standard will be released by central government mid-year, and these will identify any new standards the region needs to meet in the freshwater space.

Regional water services collaboration: The mayoral forum has backed a plan to initiate a regional centre of excellence for waters activity and asset management across seven Waikato councils.

The forum heard that the three waters business units of local government business have resourcing challenges, and collaboration between the participating councils “is the right thing to do”. The seven councils are Hauraki, Thames-Coromandel, Waitomo, Matamata-Piako, Taupō, South Waikato and Waipā.

The forum supported the development of a project for establishing the regional centre of excellence, which was expected to be an expansion of the current Waikato Roding Asset Technical Accord business unit.

The project plan will be reported back to the forum in three months, and the findings of its investigation work and planned response provided to Minister Nanaia Mahuta.

Hauraki District Council Mayor, John Tregidga, said he believes this is a real opportunity for the Waikato to take the lead in New Zealand in this space. He said the Productivity Commission has been very critical of local government not working together, when there have to be significant savings by doing so. He said the status quo could not continue.

WAIKATO'S WELLBEING

A project to improve Waikato’s wellbeing has to be community driven if it’s to succeed, the Waikato Mayoral Forum has heard.

The Waikato Wellbeing Project is a new project, still at conception, though the idea isn't new at all, said Karen Bennett from Waikato Regional Council. It envisages people of the Waikato working together to identify a set of targets for intergenerational wellbeing, as well as measures.

The forum also heard that it was intended the Waikato wellbeing framework would align with the Government’s framework.

There’s already been considerable discussion and support for shared goals within the philanthropic sector through the Community Funders Group. Already the group has provided huge support to the project, consulting community organisations and businesses.

Getting the community engaged is the next step – a role which the forum agreed the mayors were well positioned to support.

WAIKATO PLAN: UPDATE

A regional housing initiative is progressing well, says the co-chair of the Waikato Plan Leadership Group, Bev Gatenby.

She told the forum it’s one of three key projects underway, which was discussed during a meeting with Minister Phil Twyford and Labour MP Jamie Strange during February. During the meeting Minister Twyford recognised the initiative being shown by the Wikato Plan work stream to identify the issues.

Ms Gatenby said the minister saw the structure as very constructive. He did make the point that housing is a complex system, which requires intervention at many different places by business, social agencies, and central and local government.

WAIKATO-HAMILTON DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURT

The Waikato Mayoral Forum has voted unanimously to lobby Government ministers to establish the next drug and alcohol ‘treatment court’ in the region.

The region is facing a meth crisis and “we are not going to arrest our way out of the drug and alcohol issue”, the forum heard. The solution is changing Waikato's court structure to have an alcohol and drug treatment court primarily focused on rehabilitation for addicts, and with a strong Māori component.

Addicts will still need to go through the court process, plead guilty to their crime, and then commit to the programme for two years. Each person remains accountable to the court, has residential and family support. The “treatment court” has been very successful in Auckland where it has been trialled since 2002 – of the 180 participants, there has been a 40 per cent success rate.

While the mayoral forum supported a Waikato programme, concerns were raised about whether the region has the necessary infrastructure, funding and trained people to support the treatment court process.

The forum heard a group, comprising iwi and a number of agencies including Corrections and Waikato Police, had been working for about six months to ensure the infrastructure is in place.

The forum voted unanimously in favour of its chair, Waikato regional councillor Alan Livingston, writing a letter to Ministers Little and Clark advising strong support for the treatment court being established in the Waikato. The forum will also extend an invitation to the judges involved to present to the next meeting.

WAIKATO LASS: UPDATE

Waikato LASS is looking to expand its activities, in particular in the technology and digital space, the Waikato Forum has heard.

Waikato District Council CEO Gavin Ion said it was “the right thing for the future of the company”. A business analyst has been employed and is looking at the opportunities, as well as engaging with staff at the different councils to “identify priorities we can focus on”.

He advised the forum that the Waikato LASS statement of intent is due to be released by the end of February.

Mr Ion said it was “an exciting time for us, but we're aware that we'll be asking for more money to enable us to undertake more activities”. He said the company was very clear that it would need to demonstrate benefit to its shareholders.

The company was also looking to apply greater efficiencies, including reducing the number of directors from 12 to six – one an independent.

TE WAKA: UPDATE

The number one priority project coming out of last year’s Waikato Economic Summit is linked authentic tourism infrastructure, industry and operator development, says Te Waka Board chair, Dallas Fisher.

He told the forum it would provide jobs in the locations and of the type required in the region, integrate walking/cycle trails and river linkages, fill out the existing Waikato offering of Hobbiton and

Waitomo Caves, utilise Waikato's distinctive natural environment and heritage, and provide key links to Kingitanga

Combining authentic tourism and cultural education would leverage the Māori economic powerhouse to incorporate the cultural offering, and enable the region to tell the authentic New Zealand cultural story of Kingitanga, land wars and the Tainui waka landing, he said.

A framing paper developed for Government by a Waikato working group sets out the principles for selection of projects. Combined, these projects could look to leverage up to \$100 million of Government funding, plus private and iwi partnerships.

During his presentation to the forum, Mr Fisher also provided an update on the Provincial Growth Fund applications. He said the applications are complex, requiring lobbying together to get material money. Of 57 applications and EOIs to the fund, nine projects totalling \$2.37 million had been approved, 26 had been declined, 11 required further information and 8 are being assessed.

Looking forward, Mr Fisher said a refreshed Māori Economic Action Plan would be launched over the next six months, and a Māori Economic Development Taskforce would be set up to support the growth of Māori enterprises.

Meanwhile, a request for the appointment of an iwi representative to the Te Waka Board was deferred to enable further investigation.

HAMILTON-AUCKLAND CORRIDOR: UPDATE

Hamilton City Council's Blair Bowcott provided an update on the multi-agency project looking at the high growth corridor from Cambridge and Te Awamutu in the south, to Papakura in the north.

He told the forum that the project partners had recently met in Hamilton with Minister Phil Twyford, stepping him through the work that has been completed to date which has culminated in a statement of shared spatial intent.

The forum heard there were four key findings of the initial investigation:

- The corridor has enduring spatial limits to further urban growth.
- The road network has become the dominant land use shaper – a more balanced approach is needed.
- There is significant but specific development potential.
- Ongoing development will require significant enabling investment.

HEALTHY RIVERS/WAI ORA: PROPOSED WAIKATO REGIONAL PLAN CHANGE 1

Hearings for the proposed plan change to improve the health of the Waikato and Waipā rivers is due to start on Monday, 11 March.

Five independent hearings commissioners have been appointed and will look to report back to the council in September this year, said Waikato Regional Council CE, Vaughan Payne.

Mr Payne said an information forum on science and economic modelling had been held last November. A series of workshops were also being held with submitters looking at:

- how to deal with commercial vegetable production
- farm environment plans as a key tool to improve land use at a property level
- sub-catchment planning to inform farm environment plans.

UPPER NORTH ISLAND SUPPLY CHAIN PANEL: UPDATE

Waikato Regional Council has submitted on the Upper North Island Supply Chain Strategy, saying that freight and cargo should be located at the port nearest the population that it is serving.

Vaughan Payne said the council had raised concerns about any potential relocation of port operations and activities in the upper North Island, and was not convinced a move from the Ports of Auckland to Northport was a sound move.

Mr Payne said there had been large public and private investment in the Waikato based on the current three-port configuration and the council had made it very clear shipping north would double the cost to our region's freight.