

Date: 30 April 2025

His Worship Mayor Brown and Councillors
Auckland Council
135 Albert Street
AUCKLAND

Your Worship and Councillors

City Centre Advisory Panel – Feedback on Annual Plan 2025-2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Auckland Council's Annual Plan 2025–2026.

The City Centre Advisory Panel comprises members representing central Tāmaki Makaurau's business, retail, residential, local board, tertiary, design, climate, arts and culture, tourism, social sectors, and tangata whenua interests. We bring both lived experience and professional expertise, with deep connections across Auckland and Aotearoa.

As a collective, we are committed to Auckland's success. A thriving region relies on a strong and vibrant city centre — the heart of our city and the nation's hub for employment, education, transport, tourism, and cultural identity. Because of this, we believe the city centre must remain a key strategic priority for the Council group and urge stronger recognition of its importance in the direction-setting documents.

The City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) continues to provide a clear vision for the future. We reiterate our collective support for its outcomes and call on the Council to reflect these more strongly within the Annual Plan. The success of the city centre is essential to the prosperity and liveability of the wider region and must be treated as such.

Panel Priorities

In November 2023, the Panel identified six key focus areas as part of our input into the Long-term Plan. These remain critical and should be prioritised in the 2025/26 Annual Plan:

1. **Community and Visitor Safety:** Build on the progress made to ensure people feel safe and supported, and that perceptions align with improvements.
2. **Enhance Vibrancy and Experience:** Support activations and initiatives that attract people and enhance the public realm.
3. **Grow a Thriving Residential Population:** Enable strong residential growth targets and support infrastructure to make city centre living desirable and inclusive.
4. **Premier Learning and Innovation Hub:** Realise the city centre's potential as a national hub for education, research, and innovation.
5. **Maximise the Value of Integrated Transport Networks:** Improve access through better integration, especially in the lead-up to CRL's opening.
6. **Increase Climate Resilience:** Advance adaptation and emissions reduction measures in line with Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri.

Feedback on Annual Plan 2025-2026

The panel provided feedback on the Mayoral Proposal for the annual plan, and our feedback on the Annual Plan 2025-2026 consultation remains consistent with this:

1. Funding destination management and major events

Events and destination management plays a critical role in attracting visitors and driving Auckland's economy. The Panel strongly supports funding and maintaining a strong and consistent pipeline of major events, cruise ship arrivals, and daily activations — including local events — is essential. These activities not only draw more people into the city centre but also contribute to a safer, more vibrant, and well-used public realm.

- The panel considers funding for major events non-negotiable due to their proven economic, cultural, and social benefits, which play a key role in Auckland's vibrancy and appeal.
- The impending lack of major events funding beyond June 2025 is a significant concern, both in short term delivery as well as longer-term confidence in procurement of attractions.
- Without adequate funding, Auckland will lose its competitive edge, especially as Australian cities continue to heavily invest in destination marketing and major events.
- The impacts of reduced investment in this area are being evidenced through a worrying drop in cruise visits to Auckland and an inability to compete against other large cities.
- Reductions in funding for these activities are not cost savings but economic losses.
- Any scenario where the \$7 million shortfall is not addressed is unacceptable, as this equates to an economic loss of additional GDP of between \$21m and \$35m annually, with rolling procurement impact building in subsequent years.
- The panel strongly urges the council and central government to fast-track the introduction of alternative funding solutions, such as a bed tax, to address the \$7 million budget shortfall and enable the resumption of major event funding from FY26 onwards.
- If a sustainable funding mechanism cannot be agreed upon, the panel strongly advocates for Council to provide bridging funding to ensure momentum is maintained and the events pipeline remains intact.
- The panel urges swift decision-making to provide certainty and allow sufficient time to plan and build the event pipeline.

2. Structural reform

The panel has previously provided feedback on the structural reforms proposed in the Draft Mayoral Proposal, taking an outcome-focused approach to the feedback, rather than specifying where functions should be delivered:

- Urban regeneration, economic and cultural development, and integrated transport are essential to the success of the city centre and require strong alignment.
- Regardless of where urban regeneration and economic and cultural development are positioned within the Council group, these functions must receive dedicated funding and resources.

- These functions must not be overshadowed by broader Council operations so that their focus remains on delivering critical outcomes for the city centre and Auckland as a whole.
- It is important that a multi-year, long term strategic approach is taken to urban regeneration, economic and cultural development and the attraction of major events (including business events).
- Transition risks, particularly the potential loss of institutional knowledge within Council-Controlled Organisations (CCOs), should be actively addressed to maintain continuity and safeguard valuable expertise.

Urban Regeneration

- Strong, place-centred leadership is essential for successful city centre regeneration. This requires a clear mandate, defined accountability, cross-agency support, and dedicated funding and resources to drive effective implementation.
- The Panel acknowledges the positive progress made over the past 18 months in advancing a more integrated approach through the lead agency model. This has improved coordination and transparency, and it is vital that this momentum is sustained through any transition.
- The Panel urges that the new operating model build on and strengthen this approach — reinforcing direct, accountable leadership through a single point of contact, backed by a clear mandate, secure funding, and targeted resourcing. This will support more streamlined and effective engagement with stakeholders and partners and ensure continued progress toward city centre outcomes.

Economic and Cultural Development, Destination Marketing

- The panel believes that economic and cultural development, destination marketing and major events (including business events) require a dedicated budget and skilled and focused team to maintain a long-term, sustainable pipeline of activities and the marketing and promotion of Auckland as an attractive place to visit and live.

3. Integrated Transport Plan

- Integrated transport networks are fundamental to a thriving, accessible, and well-functioning city centre. The Panel recommends that transport planning and delivery be more closely aligned with place-based outcomes and made more accountable to local priorities to ensure that execution and implementation are in alignment with strategy. Council is urged to embed this approach within the structural reform process.
- The Panel remains firmly committed to the realisation of Access for Everyone (A4E) and calls for faster, more coordinated progress. Improved accessibility is essential to addressing immediate challenges and to maximising the benefits of the City Rail Link (CRL). Council should consider how funding and resourcing can be better aligned to support this work.
- Clear planning around traffic circulation is critical to improving access and informing future investment. As we approach the CRL's opening in 2026, the Panel emphasises the need for clarity around how transport systems will function and integrate. Immediate, practical interventions should be prioritised alongside longer-term proposals to address existing transport issues and ensure a smooth transition to a post-CRL network.
- **Time-of-Use Charging** - The panel supports the Time-of-Use Charging initiative in

principle and advocates for an evidence-driven approach to its implementation. It is noted that current timelines suggest this initiative will be introduced after the opening of the City Rail Link (CRL), which should inform its planning and rollout.

2. Growth – planning and paying for it

- The panel acknowledges the Council’s successful role in facilitating urban growth in key areas such as Wynyard Quarter and encourages the continuation of such efforts to support sustainable city centre development with a strong focus on residential living.
- The panel emphasises the importance and relevance of the City Centre Masterplan to the future of Auckland’s city centre and stresses the need for continued investment in its implementation to deliver long-term benefits.
- Aligned with the Future Development Strategy, the city centre is a strategic growth area for accommodating future population and economic expansion. Council investment must reflect this priority and support the vision of a high-quality, compact urban form.
- Recognising the city centre as a critical hub for accommodating future population and economic growth, the panel reinforces the importance of Council investments aligning with the vision of a quality, compact city.
- The Panel urges Council to work with central government to remove regulatory barriers that limit flexible and affordable development. This includes reviewing outdated policies — such as restrictions on converting office buildings — and urban planning constraints like viewshaft protections, which can hinder well-considered, sustainable growth.
- To encourage efficient development, the Panel recommends incentivising growth in areas with existing infrastructure. Tools such as variable development contributions could help direct investment where it can be most effectively supported, optimising current assets while promoting intensification.
- The Panel also recommends targeted strategies to revitalise underutilised areas or “activity deadzones” in the city centre to ensure all precincts contribute to vibrancy, amenity, and economic vitality.
- Attracting a more diverse residential population — including families — requires strengthened city centre infrastructure and services. The Panel supports initiatives such as establishing inner-city schools and community facilities to create a more liveable and inclusive environment.
- Finally, the Panel advocates for stronger community-building efforts, including the development of more empowered and representative resident groups. Strengthening the voice of city centre residents is essential to fostering a sense of belonging and supporting a thriving, long-term residential community.

3. Safety and security

- Community safety and wellbeing remain key priorities for the Panel. We encourage greater investment not only in traditional safety and security measures but also in broader initiatives that support the wellbeing of all community members — particularly those who are most vulnerable.
- The Panel acknowledges the positive impact of recent investments in improving safety outcomes across the city centre. In particular, the increased presence of police patrols has played a significant role in creating a safer and more welcoming

environment.

- While the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR) has been instrumental in supporting these improvements, the Panel notes that safety initiatives were not its original intended use. We strongly urge Council to identify and establish sustainable, long-term funding mechanisms through the Annual Plan to ensure continued support for these essential programmes without compromising the core intent of the CCTR.

4. Additional considerations

Premier Learning and Innovation Hub:

- Establishing a premier learning and innovation hub is a key priority for the Panel. This is a significant opportunity to enhance the experience for students and position Tāmaki Makaurau — and the city centre in particular — as a leading destination for tertiary education and innovation. This objective should be given greater prominence in both the Annual Plan and the Long-term Plan.

Post-CRL: A chance for people to enjoy and celebrate

- The Panel emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for Aucklanders and visitors to enjoy and celebrate the transformative investment made in the city centre. We acknowledge the disruption caused by construction — particularly around the new CRL stations — and support providing these areas with a period of respite, enjoyment, and activation following completion.
- While a reduction in the intensity of disruption is welcomed, the Panel strongly cautions against slowing or withdrawing public investment in the city centre. Ongoing development remains vital to the long-term success and resilience of a growing city centre.
- Council is encouraged to strengthen collaboration with the private sector to align investment and integrate delivery across public and private projects. The Panel also supports a more strategic, programme-based approach to planning and implementation to improve coordination, efficiency, and outcomes.
- Investment must go beyond hard infrastructure. The Panel highlights the value of city centre activations and place-making initiatives that contribute to vibrancy, engagement, and a sense of place. The panel also encourages the exploration of low-cost, high-impact interventions that minimise disruption while improving the everyday experience for city centre users.

Downtown West urban realm and transport outcomes

- In a letter to the Governing Body dated 29 April 2024, the Panel expressed its strong support for the proposed transport and streetscape improvements in Downtown West. This includes the removal of the Hobson Street flyover, upgrades to the street network, and improvements to bus facilities along Lower Hobson Street, Customs Street West, and Sturdee Street.
- The Panel also confirmed its interest in being actively involved in key milestones of the design and delivery process to help ensure that the final outcomes align with the city centre's long-term vision and deliver best-for-city outcomes.

Future fund and city deals:

- The Panel recommends that Council explore opportunities to support city centre revitalisation through mechanisms such as the Future Fund and City Deals. These tools could help unlock further investment to sustain momentum and deliver transformational change.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Scott Pritchard', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Scott Pritchard Independent Chair
CITY CENTRE ADVISORY PANEL