

24 February 2025

To: Chair and members - Policy and Planning Committee
CC: Mayors Office; City Centre Executive Steering Committee; Head of Auckland Policy Office
Auckland Council
135 Albert Street
AUCKLAND

Kia ora Councillor Hills and members of the Policy and Planning Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to present this chair's report as a record of the key discussions and issues from the City Centre Advisory Panel meeting on 24 February 2025.

Community Safety and Wellbeing

The panel received a detailed update on key metrics and insights, providing valuable context on current community safety and wellbeing conditions in the city centre. Members acknowledged the efforts of Grant Tetzlaff, Duncan McLaggan, Adrian Wilson, and their teams, noting the breadth of initiatives underway and the positive progress achieved to date.

Improving community safety and wellbeing remains a key priority for the panel. Members welcomed recent improvements, including increased police presence, enhanced responsiveness, and better coordination across agencies—many of which reflect longstanding areas of advocacy from the panel. However, they also acknowledged that ongoing challenges remain and need continued attention.

The panel reiterated that its recommendation to increase investment in community safety through the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR) was intended as a temporary, two-year measure. This decision was made in response to service gaps and an urgent need for intervention at the time. It was noted that the CCTR was not originally designed to fund core safety services, particularly when over \$183 million in general rates are collected annually from the city centre. As such, the panel stressed the need to clarify the ongoing role of the targeted rate within the city's broader funding strategy for safety and wellbeing.

The upcoming refresh of the City Centre Safety Plan is seen as a key opportunity to shape the future direction of safety initiatives. The panel emphasised the importance of clearly defining the outcomes we want to achieve—especially in addressing the needs of the city centre's most vulnerable communities.

To guide this, the panel supported the development of a clear, practical framework that defines and measures what a "safe city" means. This framework should provide a strong evidence base to support future investment decisions and enable better prioritisation of resources. Members highlighted the importance of benchmarking Auckland's approach against international cities of similar scale and identifying the core interventions that consistently deliver safety outcomes.

In shaping this framework, the panel requested that it:

- Incorporate diverse community perspectives and needs;
- Improve understanding of safety concerns and barriers from people who currently avoid the city centre;

- Include gender-disaggregated data to ensure an inclusive approach;
- Factor in the impacts of climate change, recognising how major weather events can disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.

The panel also expressed concern about a perceived abdication of responsibility by other agencies, which created the funding gaps that CCTR has been used to address. As conditions evolve, members stressed the importance of reassessing whether this investment remains the most effective and appropriate use of targeted rate contributions—and whether it continues to reflect stakeholder expectations.

Finally, while recognising the need for consistency in CCTR funding and the limited scope for significant changes, the panel requested that staff bring forward clear recommendations—either to confirm or make minor adjustments to the remaining safety and wellbeing funding allocation—as part of the safety plan refresh.

Sustainability and Climate Change

The panel held a wide-ranging discussion on sustainability and climate change from a city centre perspective, highlighting how deeply interconnected these issues are across all levels of society.

Members agreed that building resilience must be a shared priority, requiring both immediate action and long-term planning. There was a strong call to elevate the focus on adaptation in Council's approach, as it currently feels like an afterthought—despite the growing frequency and severity of climate-related events. The 2023 floods, particularly along the waterfront, were cited as a stark reminder of the risks we face.

The panel stressed the need for greater clarity around the Council's role in preparing the city centre for future climate events. Members highlighted the importance of practical guidance and public education, particularly for residents and businesses. This includes not only emergency preparedness, but also a better understanding of long-term infrastructure needs and operational changes that may be required.

Tātaki Auckland Unlimited's upcoming Climate Connect resources were welcomed, particularly for their focus on supporting small and medium-sized businesses to adapt and build resilience. However, members also highlighted the need for stronger leadership across the board.

The value of blue-green infrastructure was strongly endorsed. Members pointed to projects like the Quay Street upgrades, where investment in sea walls and planting delivered meaningful resilience benefits. These examples showed that, while trade-offs were required, the outcomes justified the decisions. However, the panel agreed that infrastructure alone won't protect the city centre from extreme weather—community and business preparedness remains essential.

A more localised understanding of climate risks was seen as critical. The panel called for precinct-specific insights to help shape targeted responses for different parts of the city centre.

The Panel also noted that assumptions about energy reliability, infrastructure resilience, and access to resources are changing, and need to be reviewed regularly to ensure decision-making stays relevant.

The panel discussed the need to define what it means for Auckland's city centre to be a leader in sustainability. There was support for a dedicated workshop to explore this further, define shared goals, and consider the collective action needed. Members acknowledged that meaningful progress

requires purposeful decisions—and that delaying action only reinforces the status quo and increases future risks.

City Centre Targeted Rate Extension

A workshop session was held to explore current data and insights across several key aspects of the city centre, supporting discussion on the proposed extension of the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR) beyond its current end date of 2031. A summary of key insights from the session is provided in Attachment 1.

The panel noted that while the city centre economy is primarily driven by the services sector, retail, hospitality, and food and beverage businesses play a critical role in shaping the city centre's vibrancy and appeal. These sectors are essential to the overall experience for workers, residents, students, and visitors, and should continue to be supported despite their relatively smaller contribution to GDP.

The panel also questioned whether the city centre has the necessary density and intensity of activity outside of its "core". Concerns were raised about the potential risk of spreading investment too thinly, and whether a more focused approach is needed—prioritising areas that deliver the strongest return in terms of investment and attraction.

There was interest in better understanding central government's position on key issues, particularly given that many of the challenges and opportunities discussed have implications beyond the city centre.

Finally, the panel highlighted the importance of access to strong data, measures, and insights to guide future investment decisions. Having the right tools in place will be essential to track outcomes, evaluate impact, and build a compelling case for the ongoing use—or expansion—of targeted rate funding.

St James Theatre

The Advisory Panel were asked to provide feedback on the St James Theatre restoration project, with a specific focus on its interface with the current Queen Street frontage. The panel considered this item at its 24 February 2025 workshop, three days before the Governing Body decision at the 27 February meeting.

It is acknowledged that the restoration of the St James Theatre has a long and complex history. Some panel members are new to this topic, while others, having served longer, have previously contributed advice that informed decisions, including the original Council decision to allocate funding for its restoration.

The panel also recognises that a wide range of views exist on this issue. Given the limited time available, the panel has not had the opportunity to fully debate every aspect of the matter

In relation to the interface with the Queen Street frontage, the panel has agreed the following points:

1. The panel supports the principle of preserving heritage and is committed to revitalising this part of the city centre.
2. The panel recognises the significance of the site and strongly agrees that its current state is an eyesore on Queen Street. In this context, the existing condition is considered untenable.

3. The Queen Street frontage is of particular concern, and resolution of this should be a key priority for Council. The panel wishes to be actively involved in exploring options to address this issue.
4. The panel encourages the Council to make a decision that enables faster progress to be made on redeveloping the site and improving the Queen Street frontage.

The panel was not specifically asked to provide feedback on the merits of the Council's \$15 million funding commitment or its reconfirmation, and there was insufficient background and analysis provided to allow informed comment on this aspect. However, should Council choose to review the funding arrangement, the panel wishes to be involved in the process.

Next meeting: Monday 5 May, 2-5pm

Yours sincerely



Scott Pritchard
Independent Chair
CITY CENTRE ADVISORY PANEL