THE ENGINE ROOM
Queen Street Valley, the CBD and Retail District
VISION

THE ENGINE ROOM IS CRITICAL TO AUCKLAND AND NEW ZEALAND’S ECONOMY

OUR 2032 VISION IS THAT THE ENGINE ROOM:

- Is vital to the regional and national economy, and the location of choice for national and international head offices
- Remains focused on Queen Street, which will be progressively further enhanced to include temporary road closures for events, shared space along some of its length, and could ultimately include a light rail route from the waterfront to Karangahape Road
- Has a high-quality public realm supporting distinct precincts that are retail and entertainment destinations, with a colourful programme of street-based events
- Has publicly accessible Wi-Fi for the whole city centre.
BACKGROUND

More than many central business districts, Auckland is defined by a single main street. At the heart of a grid of city blocks and sitting in the centre of a valley, Queen Street is our 'Golden Mile'. As a consequence of this single dominant street, commerce (national and international trade, finance, property, investment and legal services) shares the area with primary retail, creating a distinctly Auckland CBD or Engine Room.

While Queen Street begins with Newton Road, the Engine Room starts at Victoria Street, descending northwards to the harbour in an almost straight line flanked by streets with their own character, from the 'buzz' of High Street to the corporate cluster along Shortland Street. This area, which crosses over into Transformational Moves 1 and 2, contains many of Auckland’s valued heritage buildings and spaces, reflecting the development and settlement of the city centre. This wealth of heritage gives Queen Street and its grid of connected streets a unique sense of place, attracts visitors, and helps create an environment where business wants to locate.

The Engine Room is critical to Auckland’s and New Zealand’s economy, yet it competes for attention and resources with other commercial centres and the waterfront, which has become an attractive destination for corporate head offices. Similarly, its reputation as a retail destination has come under threat from suburban shopping malls and growing sub-regional centres. The growth of apartments in the Engine Room has also created challenges, as the area attempts to define its changing place in the hearts of Aucklanders.

This transformational move recognises the Engine Room’s need to cement and grow its pre-eminent role in the nation’s economy. Its future lies in emphasising its identity and uniqueness, including the interesting and colourful precincts such as the Britomart Quarter, Emily Place, High Street and the SkyCity area.

Further investment in the area’s amenity is required, with more street upgrades and the creation of breakout spaces at its edges (the Victoria Street Green Link, Quay Street, Emily Place, Nelson Street and Albert Park). A full programme of events will be essential to enlivening and giving greater depth to the area, and attracting people into the streets at all times of the day.

Bringing fibre optic technology into the city centre will support the Engine Room by making it easier for residents and businesses to compete in an international marketplace, and for the international marketplace to connect with us.

Schools, hospitals and 90 percent of businesses will be connected to ultra-fast broadband by 2015, homes and the remaining businesses by 2019. Currently, eight percent of Aucklanders work from home. Increasing this proportion through better access to ultra-fast broadband will help reduce pressure on roads at peak times and improve the quality of residential living. Perhaps more important than the physical improvements will be providing the business, commercial and retail sectors with a planning and regulatory environment that enables them to grow and flourish.

OUTCOME SCORECARD

✓ SO1 International Destination
✓ SO2 Globally Significant Centre for Business
✓ SO3 Meeting the Needs of its Residential Population
✓ SO4 Culturally Rich and Creative
✓ SO5 An Exemplar of Urban Living
✓ SO6 Integrated Regional Transport
✓ SO7 Walkable and Accessible
✓ SO8 Exceptional Natural Environment and Leading Environmental Performer

SO9 World-Leading Centre for Education, Research and Innovation
QUEEN STREET - ONGOING REVITALISATION

Queen Street underwent a $40 million revamp in 2007. Footpaths were widened and laid in basalt stone, native nikau palms were planted, new pedestrian crossings were introduced, and seating improved along its length. These measures were supported by a stronger maintenance regime to reflect the investment and importance of Queen Street.

The results have been impressive; a 25 percent increase in weekday pedestrian traffic on Queen Street between 2007 and 2008 (the last time foot traffic was measured). The double-phase pedestrian crossings have been well received, slowing traffic down considerably, reducing pedestrian waiting times and improving safety markedly.

Opportunities exist for further improvement, both in the streetscape and the performance of shops and businesses along its route. The possibility of permanently making parts of Queen Street pedestrian malls has been much discussed. This would mean totally removing vehicles from the street, except for a possible future light rail system. This could be an appropriate solution for sections of the street.

The desired outcomes could be delivered for other sections through a shared space approach, with buses, service vehicles and local traffic still able to operate along its full length but sharing the street with pedestrians. An incremental improvement programme could begin now with temporary road closures for specific events, then at lunchtimes/weekends (as per Little Collins Street in Melbourne), followed by the staged rollout of shared space along certain stretches, and possibly a future light rail system.

Perhaps more important than further investment in Queen Street’s floorscape is a concerted effort by landlords, Heart of the City and the Council to attract more quality retail. New investment could be investigated for encouraging retail sector growth through appropriate planning and financial tools. People’s perception of the street will also need to be transformed though greater control of signage and shopfront displays. This will assure new and existing quality retailers that neighbouring shops will not undermine their investment. A sunset policy on inappropriate signage and an associated grant/loan scheme for shopfront improvement will be investigated.
ALBERT STREET

Albert Street is perhaps one of the city centre’s most disappointing streets, marred by several poorly designed, late 20th-century developments that have prioritised car access over the street’s pedestrian experience. The result is an austere and utilitarian streetscape, despite some inherent qualities; the street’s gentle descent to the harbour’s edge, the sense of enclosure along its route created by buildings (including a few heritage buildings) and several mature trees, and the resulting framed view to the water.

The street is a vital component of the Engine Room with many important corporate offices fronting it. Enhancing the street will undoubtedly benefit the Engine Room as a business address.

As the City Rail Link’s proposed route runs underneath Albert Street, its construction, together with coordinated council improvements, offers a real opportunity for the street to be transformed.
FORT STREET AND SHORTLAND STREET

Fort Street and Shortland Street continue to be two of Auckland’s premier business addresses. They have long been an important part of the city’s commercial life, with many warehouses and office buildings and several significant heritage buildings. Under the Engine Room transformation these streets will continue to offer commercial office space as part of the Engine Room quarter. They are ideally located close to high-quality public transport, retail, entertainment and recreation areas. Continued vehicle access to offices is required, but traffic calming will be considered and streetscapes upgraded.
POTENTIAL
HIGH STREET
HIGH STREET AND LORNE STREET

High Street is already a major drawcard for tourists and Aucklanders with its historic character, boutique retail, food and beverage and entertainment offering in the heart of the city centre. Being part of the emerging laneway circuit and close to Queen Street, it provides a pleasant, lively and interesting walking and shopping experience, although its role is being challenged by a similar offering at Britomart. The area is surrounded by numerous commercial offices and residential buildings and is highly accessible to visitors both day and night.

Further enhancement of High Street and Lorne Street – reinforcing the pedestrian scale, slow traffic speed and shop window experience – will ensure they play a vital role in the city centre laneway circuit and provide a complementary offering to other parts of the route like Britomart and Federal Street.

As the Engine Room will be the focus of council and targeted rate expenditure and activation over the next 10 years, High Street and the other smaller-scaled streets either side of Queen Street are likely to get better and better.
EXISTING

POTENTIAL
EMILY PLACE

Emily Place, presently dominated by car parking, has great potential to be transformed into a vibrant urban space, a breakout space for Engine Room office workers and an attractive connection between Britomart Station and the universities. It has an intimate urban scale, is surrounded by character and heritage buildings and several mature trees, and offers a real oasis in the city.

It also has a rich history, being the original location of Point Britomart. In pre-colonial times it was a pā site, then the site of Fort Britomart and St Paul’s Church, and subsequently excavated for the reclamation of downtown Auckland.

A public space upgrade might include a cascade of terraces stepping down from Emily Place Reserve, creating flat areas of lawn, paving and decking. Outdoor cafés, picnic places and play areas would enliven these areas. Low-angled walls could be made from engineered earth taken from the site, giving a distinctive sense of place and alluding to the historic excavation of Point Britomart. A planted swale would separate the single lane of traffic from the terraces.