

Complex Problems, Codified Solutions When Smart Growth Isn't

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1 Introduction

While the individual elements of smart growth appear to be matters of good planning practice, collectively and applied without due consideration of context, they may give rise to unwanted outcomes.

This possibility is explored through reference to the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy, which was developed in the 1990s drawing on smart growth principles.

The prescriptive nature of smart growth— particularly its core tenets of planning for compact cities, intensification, reuse, pedestrianisation, and privileging public transport – promotes the application of common rules for physical planning to diverse areas and communities.

Indeed, smart growth may be the antithesis of flexible planning that respects the integrity of communities and the distinctiveness of places. It can be interpreted as part of a globalising movement through which a distinctive set of values is given particular emphasis and physical expression.

This is not new – planning practice has long been an important if benign facet of colonisation dating back to the lessons about public health, land use, and mobility brought from the old world to the new. However, smart growth is a latecomer to the modernisation project.¹ In a post-modern world that is at once diverse, fractured and inter-connected, a quest for order and certainty through reliance on a trans-national planning code appears contradictory, at best, and doomed to failure at worst.

2 What is Smart Growth?

Smart growth certainly has a resonance about it. In an attempt to claim the ethical high ground, though, there is a risk that it becomes all things to all people.

According to the Smart Growth Network its aims are:

- *Create a range of housing opportunities and choices*
- *Create walkable neighbourhoods*
- *Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration*
- *Foster distinctive, attractive places with a strong sense of place*
- *Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective*
- *Mix land uses*
- *Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas*
- *Provide a variety of transportation choices*
- *Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities*
- *Take advantage of compact building design*

As defined by the American Planning Association, Smart Growth:

“means using comprehensive planning to guide, design, develop, revitalize and build communities for all that:

- *Have a unique sense of community and place*
- *Preserve and enhance valuable natural and cultural resources;*
- *Equitably distribute the costs and benefits of development;*
- *Expand the range of transportation, employment and housing choices in a fiscally responsible manner;*

¹ There is some irony in the fact that many of the outcomes sought by Smart Growth are long-established realities in the world's more impoverished cities.

- *Value long-range, regional considerations of sustainability over short term incremental geographically isolated actions; and*
- *Promotes public health and healthy communities.”*

There is little to disagree with in these lists, according to which smart growth apparently encompasses most forms of good planning practice, as we know it.

However, the APA web page on smart growth (www.planning.org/policyguides/smartgrowth.htm) moves from everyday generalities about good planning, to proselytising. It suggests that “*compact, transit accessible, pedestrian-oriented, mixed use development patterns and land reuse*” epitomise Smart Growth principles. The implication: if it isn’t compact, it isn’t smart. The issue is not that the individual principles behind Smart Growth are wrong. Rather, it is their uncritical application and the tendency to “buy into the whole package” without due regard for context that is problematic.

Smart Growth is contrasted with “prevalent development practices” because it:

“refocuses a larger share of regional growth within central cities, urbanized areas, inner suburbs, and areas that are already served by infrastructure. Smart Growth reduces the share of growth that occurs on newly urbanizing land, existing farmlands, and in environmentally sensitive areas. In areas with intense growth pressure, development in newly urbanizing areas should be planned and developed according to Smart Growth principles”.

In this prescription, a shift occurs, from flexibility associated with community needs and distinctive places to solutions applied regardless of cultural and natural conditions. Under smart growth, choice prevails as long as it falls largely within existing city structures. The distribution of costs and benefits is conditioned by the dynamics of renewal and containment. Fiscal responsibility means infill and reuse, while geographically isolated solutions are treated as inevitably short-term in nature.

Even if smart growth does define how we should all live, the issue remains whether it can deliver, given that it encompasses such a high level of prescription, promotes strong delineation in the face of increasingly fuzzy boundaries (between town and country, for example) and the core principles seem to deny flexibility, diversity, the uniqueness of place, and social, cultural and environmental heritage.

3 The Critiques

There are several possible critiques of smart growth. The first is historical. Smart growth ignores fundamental movements in human affairs, and in this may be insensitive to contemporary cultural elements of development (Bruegmann, 2005).

In this critique, smart growth fails to acknowledge the age-old human quest for space and the almost inevitable reduction of urban densities that accompanies increasing prosperity. It also departs from the roots of planning, which lie in 19th Century reformists’ concerns to provide an industrialising workforce with some of the qualities of life afforded the elite (if only to maintain workforce productivity).

The second critique is a variant on the theme that markets rather than regulation deliver socially appropriate outcomes. In its less extreme form, this claim is qualified by the need to regulate in response to externalities. New Zealand’s Resource Management Act promised this approach for environmental values, for example.

However, ideological debates harden around this critique. Antagonists favour incentives ahead of regulation to protect the environment and maximise personal choice (O’Toole, 2000, McShane, 2005). There is consequently a risk that it shifts from a liberal position around which debate is possible, to a libertarian one that, like smart growth itself, brooks no compromise.

A third critique is that the costs of smart growth, fully measured, may exceed the benefits, something not often tested under the weight of institutionalised dogma (Troy, 1996). Smart growth may provide a clumsy set of tools for achieving the environmental, social or economic outcomes that the community is seeking. It reduces the need to identify and specify outcomes in any detail, and to consider identify and evaluate alternative methods for achieving them. In New Zealand, in fact, we have a range of statutory instruments for managing growth that should, in theory, avoid adherence to a particular line (Tremaine, 2005). However, the elevation of physical planning tools may be limiting our capacity to manage growth in all its dimensions.

The fourth critique is institutional and has not, to my knowledge, been widely developed in this particular field, although it was hinted at by Brain (1999) with reference to new urbanism:

“The effort to justify New Urbanist principles as the means to the end of community, as the technical tools to produce specific social outcomes, could easily slip into the logic of the machine and the commoditization of community: that is, the reduction of ‘community’ to disconnected commodities, available for unencumbered enjoyment, produced by a machinery that is operated by designers, planners, developers, and government.

“As New Urbanists look for technical legitimacy in the context of debates over social reform and public policy, there is a real danger of slipping back into an older model of public administration, which has been top-down, technocratic, and oriented toward mitigating the encumbrances that result from living in communities. This tendency is also pushed by the demands of operating in the context of the market, which means that the realization of New Urbanist principles has to be translated into discrete commodities simply for the purpose of organizing production and marketing” (2).

By institutionalising a particular set of values and practices the smart growth movement simplifies practice, at the same time as it dulls practitioners to the essence of individual issues and circumstance, limits imagination and creativity, and elevates the contribution of the technocrat ahead of that of the community.

Adopting Smart Growth does away with the epistemological dilemmas confronting public decision makers in a contested world. This, too, is reminiscent of the neo-liberal ideology that gained some ascendancy with the demise of Keynesian economic policy, promoting a singular and internally consistent although potentially flawed model in an attempt to simplify societal complexity.

Avoiding institutionalising a particular set of knowledge (and consequently limiting practice) is a challenge. In particular, institutionalisation of values and practices can constrain planning education, and become professionally self-reinforcing. The positions held by the Smart Growth Network, the American Planning Association and the Congress for New Urbanism (<http://www.cnu.org>) reflect this.

In education, the challenges of diverse streams of thinking may be subordinated to a concern to simplify and to deliver on professional practice. Students enter planning school keen to visit their ideals on the world about them. Our response as teachers, endorsed by practitioners, is all too often simply to give them the tools to do so. Despite attention to process, consultation and evaluation, for example, our ability to reconcile the diverse wants of communities, environmental imperatives, and the quality of built environments may be compromised by a deficit in critical thinking.

4 New Forms of Growth: Counter-Urbanisation

Smart growth is a strategy for dealing with growth in a particular urban (or metropolitan) setting. It presumes continuity in the drivers of urbanisation: for example, the centripetal nature of agglomeration providing mass work opportunities and accessible labour markets; a concentration of specialist skills, generic services,

and mass markets; external economies of scale; and dense zones of transport, communication and distribution, financial and information services.

Yet, in the developed world, there are growing signs of counter-urbanisation (Champion, 1989; Burnley and Murphy, 2002). These include:

- Developing global production and distribution systems changing the relations between metropolitan regions across national boundaries: no city is an island!
- The flexible and footloose technology, information and associated services;
- Growing interest in dispersed organisational models resulting from potential societal and business disruption (terrorism, natural events, pandemics), from the liberalisation and permeability of borders and the mobility of capital;
- The continuing long-term development of long-distance, low cost transport services for goods and people, despite increasing oil prices;
- The increasing flexibility of work and a broadening of employment opportunities
- Unprecedented prosperity coupled with placeless technology and instantaneous communication;
- The growing diversity of urban populations in international cities, with increasing worker mobility at all vocational levels, and significant movements of ethnic groups through refugee and favoured migrant programmes;
- The growth of new forms of non-urban consumption in rapidly growing recreation, leisure and tourism sectors. As well as placing pressure on non-urban places, these activities generate a range of decentralised employment opportunities;
- The growing role of lifestyle in residential preferences (including but not limited to sea change), especially in ageing and prosperous populations;
- The high cost of housing in major cities discouraging long-term settlement by young families;
- The emergence of new distance models for learning, through web-based learning, flexible programme development, and satellite campuses, which reduce the imperative of large city migration as a condition of personal advancement.

Counter-urbanisation is a natural corollary to increasing prosperity as people in western societies continue a long-standing search for space (Burnley and Murphy, 2004). Today, this may take several forms, rather than simply peripheral development ("sprawl"). These forms include:

- Suburbanisation, including infill and revival;
- Exurban and peri-urban development;
- Sea change development in coastal, lake-side, alpine and other valued non-urban environments;
- A rural revival in countryside and village living;
- The shift from major metropolitan areas to smaller cities and towns.

Even as the suburban option becomes more difficult to advance as a result of containment policies, there are nevertheless interstices being absorbed into suburbs, and areas in which the benefits of existing suburbs can be shared through careful infill development.

Without opportunities for more intensive suburbanisation or expanded suburbs, however, the other elements of counter-urbanisation become yet more attractive, often placing new pressures on sensitive natural environments.

The results include increasing household and population densities in non-urban areas, and their transformation from dependence on declining (or subsidised) primary activities to consumption-based economies with many community, behavioural, and economic attributes of urban places (Joint Centre for Housing Studies, 2002, 10-11).

After decades of rural and regional development policies aimed at ending the drift to major cities, the often-sought reversal in non-metropolitan fortunes has arrived. The problem is that this movement in Auckland Region, as elsewhere, has run into the strictures of smart growth planning. These limit the potential for ex-urban development, in particular, and seek to block the pressure and potential for sea change settlement in an attractive peri-urban environment.

Unfortunately, an approach which leans heavily on containment to frustrate counter-urban tendencies risks diverting attention from policies that might effectively manage their impacts on the sensitive environments that it is presumed to protect.

5 Auckland: The Regional Setting

Auckland Region sits at the base of the northern (Northland) Isthmus of the North Island. It is a long and relatively narrow region, contained by the Hauraki Gulf and Pacific Ocean in the east and the Tasman Sea in the west. The Region is penetrated by the sprawling Waitemata, Manukau and Kaipara Harbours and associated estuaries, which create an “inner Isthmus” occupied by Auckland City. This character, together with the presence of many Gulf Islands, means that the coastline is around 14,000 km, about the same length as the Australian coast (www.arc.govt.nz/arc/environment/coast) Some 70% of its area of 16,140 km² comprises coastal and marine waters (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Auckland Region



Not surprisingly, diverse coastal and marine environments feature strongly in appreciation of the Region. For many people, this is why they live in Auckland.

People also value the diversity of the countryside, with rolling former river plains and rich volcanic loams in the south, elevated old dunes to the west, fractured hill country to the north and network of iconic volcanic cones throughout. .

Land use is equally diverse. It includes remnant patches of intensive market gardening and dairying to the south and north-west, some fat lamb and beef farming on less fertile hill country, viticulture and horticulture in favoured or traditional environments, two substantial plantation forests and a number of smaller forests and

woodlots. As restructuring has seen agricultural production, and productivity, intensify in favoured pockets of the Region and in more competitive regions, lifestyle development and hobby farming has taken up much of the slack, and is distributed more or less throughout Auckland, adding, in some eyes, to the diversity, intensity and intimacy of rural landscapes.

The pristine Waitakere Ranges lie to the west. They have been subject to increasingly intensive recreational use and residential penetration by people pursuing solitude and lifestyle. Residential development in this environment – outside the area protected in regional park or water catchment reservations -- has long been contentious. The drawbridge promises to be raised by the Waitakere Ranges Heritage Area Bill, which sets out a number of protective principles to be applied to any resource consents sought in the area.

The coastal and rural character of the Region raises the dilemma of how to provide residents access without diminishing the quality of the environments they most value. As housing choice on the urban edge becomes more limited, ready access to valued landscapes becomes possible for only a privileged minority.

The dilemma for planning is that increasing access may undermine – or at least alter – the character that makes Auckland distinctive. The simplest way of avoiding that appears to be avoidance, a technique consistent with the containment principle of smart growth but not necessarily consistent with a proactive approach to the quality of valued environments. Avoiding development that penetrates the urban edge or introduces additional population into the peri-urban environment generally appears to have become the regional planning imperative in Auckland.

6 The Auckland Regional Growth Strategy

The Auckland Regional Growth Strategy (ARGS) was introduced in 1999 after several years of deliberation by a Growth Forum comprising elected members of the Regional Council and the seven local authorities making up the Region. Its role was “to develop a growth strategy to accommodate growth in a manner that best meets the interests of the regional community” to be implemented through the regional plan and by recommending to local authorities (and others) “appropriate growth strategies for the integrated and sustainable management of the Auckland region”.

The key way of doing this would be by “promoting quality, compact urban environments (intensification)”, with:

- “most growth within the existing metropolitan area with development outside current urban limits only where environmental, accessibility and community principles can be met;
- “most urban growth focused around town centres and major transport routes to create higher density centres with a variety of housing, jobs, services, recreational and other activities (mixed use)
- “much less emphasis on general infill throughout suburban areas”. (ARC, 1999a)

Despite the informal method of developing the strategy, limited underlying consultation, and limited formal evaluation (McDermott Fairgray, 1999), and conception of the strategy as a **collaborative** and **living** document, central government took the extraordinary step five years later of giving it statutory status. The thinking behind this move is even more difficult to comprehend when the Regional Growth Strategy was due to be reviewed at the time – a review that is now proposed for 2006 – raising the risk of policy circularity, among other things.

The Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act 2004:

“(3(b)) Requires Auckland local authorities to change the policy statement and plans prepared under the Resource Management Act 1991 to integrate the land transport and land use provisions and make those provisions consistent with the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy”.

This raises questions about planning process. Under the Resource Management Act, significant policies and plans are required to undergo formal consultation and are subject to a formal and transparent evaluation of options (Section 32 and First Schedule). These steps were deficient in the preparation of the ARGS (McDermott Fairgray, 1999). As a guiding document around which council consensus could be shaped, and which could be carried forward into individual council planning procedures through a series of “sector agreements”, this may have been satisfactory. In a statutory document, it is not (see, especially, Paragraphs 38-41).

This paper suggests five areas in which the ARGS can be challenged and on which the pending review might usefully focus. These areas are the uncertainty over Auckland’s growth, the implications of increasing ethnic diversity, the environmental, social and economic consequences of residential containment, accommodating communities’ housing preferences, reviewing transport impacts, and addressing the impacts on employment.

While the merits of how the ARGS impacts on these issues (and others, such as air quality) can be debated, collectively they raise the possibility that legislation enshrining the Strategy in law was misguided.

7 Great Growth Expectations

The ARGS is based on the presumption that Auckland’s population could double over the first fifty years of the century. This is debatable.

According to the Census, Auckland’s usually resident Census night population grew by around 90,200 people between 1996 and 2001.² Yet 131,000 of these people dwelt overseas in 1996. Without international in-migration, Auckland would have experienced population decline.

The Census also indicated that 68,000 people moved from Auckland to other regions between 1996 and 2001; slightly more than the 65,600 who arrived. The numbers are small, but this is a significant turn-around – the first time in five censuses in which Auckland lost more people than it gained from the rest of New Zealand (Market Economics 2004, Pool et al, 2004). The loss contrasts with gains in nearby Bay of Plenty (8,600) and Waikato (1,500).

The notion that Auckland’s growth is inevitable and will continue at the expense of the rest of New Zealand is debatable. The consequences for the ARGS, and in particular the need for intensification if projected growth does not materialise, need to be considered.

There is a growing movement concerned that Auckland will suffer economically on the international stage if an attractive living environment cannot be sustained (e.g., www.competitiveauckland.co.nz, AREDS, 2002). With slower than forecast growth, a substantial programme of infrastructure investment could become counter-productive by imposing costs on the community that exceed the capacity to absorb them.

For example, the ARGS, aligned with the Regional Land Transport Strategy, is committing Auckland to major investments in transport infrastructure without

² Statistics New Zealand adjusted figures for mid-year populations 1996 and 2001 suggest slightly higher growth, of 102,000.

sufficient regard to the consequences if the growth projection on which it is based happens to be wrong. The presumption of a return to a centralised labour market implicit in substantial investment in public transport corridors could also cost the Region dearly if turns out to be wrong.

8 The Ethnic Dimension

Mobility adds to uncertainty over the Region's future population. According to the Census, nearly 50% of Aucklanders had been at their current address for less than 10 years in 2001. Consequently, the population is becoming increasingly diverse. First and second-generation immigrants make up a rapidly growing share in many places. People of Asian ethnicity (Indian, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, etc) make up 13% of the Region's population, but 17% in Auckland City, and at least 20% and up to 35% in many Auckland City Census area units.

Māori, too, are concentrated in individual suburbs. In 2001, they accounted for 11% of the regional population, but 40% of them dwell in Manukau City, where they make up 15% of the total. Again, there are even stronger concentrations in particular suburbs where Māori may make up to 20% to 30% of the population.

Pacific peoples comprise 13% of Auckland's population, but 23% in Manukau City, heavily concentrated in Mangere, where they are a significant majority.

Contrasts in the ethnic composition of suburbs are accentuated by movement of international migrants into core areas of the Region and by long-established residents (most often white New Zealanders) to the periphery, or beyond.

The resulting variations in the ethnic composition and character of places suggests that provision needs to be made for different housing preferences, cultural and lifestyle imperatives, employment status, and commuting needs of distinctive groups in different parts of the Region. The rapidly changing ethnic and social face of Auckland demands greater cultural sensitivity than apparent in growth policies to date. High density living for some minority groups may be compatible with extended household and village social structures. However, the form of housing and amenity delivered under the strictures of smart growth may not.

Large apartments with Harbour views in the heart of the central city may be the benign face of intensification. Small, high-rise apartments in characterless buildings on former commercial lands on the fringe of the CBD or in low decile suburbs are not.

At worst, because ethnic minorities may be aligned with areas of economic decline, they and low-income communities generally may bear the brunt of the costs of intensification. This may be through the imposition of new high or medium-rise state housing schemes, displacement by gentrification, diminishing housing affordability in areas suddenly deemed desirable for redevelopment (because of their presence on a rail corridor, accessibility, or run down nature and low capital values), severance by transport corridor development or by town centre renewal, or under-supply of open space and community facilities.

9 Housing Preferences

The protection of the Waitakere Ranges aside, the ARGS raises the vexed issues of how many residents in the future might be able to pursue lifestyles that reflect the quality of the extensive rural and coastal environments of Auckland, and how best to protect those environments. The answer is not likely to be as simple as drawing a line between rural and urban.

It could be a matter of more comprehensive planning to address carrying capacity, urban and landscape design, transport infrastructure, housing and conservation

policies (including policies to directly protect valued environments). The aim may be to provide access to and manage the impact of a shift from dominance by primary production to a mix of production and consumption activities.

The currently preferred approach is to contain investment within the Metropolitan Urban Limits (MULs), ossifying land use and community in the rural hinterland. This, together with an emphasis on medium-to high-density housing in areas amenable to rehabilitation (former industrial areas, low income suburbs, town centres that have suffered in the face of mall development, and transport corridors), has begun to shape housing choice in Auckland.

Just five years into the Strategy, the pressures of containment are beginning to tell.

The rural areas and urban edge are where much of the demand lies – evident in land prices and in pressure on land and plans. At the same time, the surge in city apartments, especially small, low cost apartments, appears to be running into a brick wall, as prices fall under the pressure of over-supply and indifferent quality (“Tenuous Future for Auckland Apartments: *New Zealand Herald*, 1 October 2005). The preservation of the environment beyond the MULs may be at the cost of the environment within them.

The barricades can be breached, however, and continuous pressure to subdivide existing titles, to force developments through the Environment Court, or to upgrade existing village, township or beach settlements have sustained relatively high rates of growth in Auckland’s hinterland, without, necessarily, the quality for planning and design that the environment merits. By rigid adherence to a policy of limiting development, the Regional Council in particular is not in a strong position to begin to negotiate and shape the development that does occur, except through the imposition of conditions. Consequently, much of the development is piecemeal, lacks design merit, and inevitably privileges those with substantial assets to begin with.

However, the capacity for people to choose to live in rural settings has helped sustain some of the qualities of the countryside. As the farming industry in Auckland declined and then rationalised from the 1970s on, have helped to sustain a flow of capital into rural areas. They have brought a new diversity in production and consumption to town and country in Auckland’s hinterland.

The results have been increased access to and created a new intimacy in rural landscapes in peri-urban Auckland. This transformation may well have reduced the environmental degradation associated with extensive animal husbandry. Water quality can recover as a result. In some instances grazing has been replaced by more productive horticulture, floriculture, and the like, often on intensively managed small lots. Woodlots, shelterbelts and tree planting mask the “intrusion” of dwellings into former green fields. Rural revival can foster innovation, support flagging infrastructure, and potentially usher in more sustainable land management.

Aucklanders’ appreciation of the country is also seen in small towns experiencing revival with the introduction of “urban capital”. The result is to maintain distributed services and make use of otherwise under-utilised infrastructure. In a number of instances, rural towns have emerged as the centres of efficient non-metropolitan labour catchments, employing local people and people from the surrounding countryside as part of their economic revival.

10 The Response to Medium Density Housing

The response to medium density housing has been mixed. Communities throughout Auckland have reacted against the imposition or threat of higher densities, leading to some compromise and greater consideration of the urban design issues raised (Dey,

2005). The physical failure of many hastily erected, "affordable" units as a result of design and material faults has undermined their popularity and value.

Conflicting objectives among stakeholders is another consequence of higher density living yet to be resolved (Dixon et.al., 2001), with different expectations for private and public space, and for governance of high-density development in an environment and culture where the privacy and amenity of suburbia has long been the norm.

Within the CBD, there is a growing contrast between quality and well-positioned prestige developments, adjacent to the Harbour or with commanding harbour views, and more utilitarian apartments. The former may be the work week residences of occupants with second homes outside the city, while the latter may be over-priced investment properties, rented to transient populations of students, immigrants and workforce entrants.

Some consequences of CBD dwelling, according to residents' surveys commissioned by the Auckland City Council, include concerns over personal safety and security, limited public spaces or spaces of indifferent quality, severance from high traffic flows, and disturbance from conflicting land uses (including 24 hour noise).

Elsewhere, the expectation that new urbanist design solutions to increase suburban densities might promote healthy living and a sense of community through increased social interaction has been questioned (Dixon and Dupuis, 2003).

The prospect of poor public health outcomes and social isolation in high-density sites promises to outweigh some of the anticipated benefits from proximity to work and entertainment. The impacts of environmental hazards (e.g., occupation of former industrial or storage sites with associated contaminants, air pollution associated with vehicle congestion, ageing underground services, and proximity to incompatible uses including, for example, dry cleaners and service stations) remain to be accounted.

One result of limiting development within or close to landscapes with high levels of natural amenity is privileging those groups with the capacity to purchase there. By creating a shortage of new, relatively low cost properties offering the qualities of suburban living – low densities, access to public and private space for informal recreation, community compatibility, and uncongested roads – intensification impacts on the distribution of wealth as well as health, as housing assets inflate differentially.

A policy of containment can reduce housing affordability. By limiting the availability of sites, high land prices drive up house prices. Auckland stands out in this regard, especially over the last five years. People are obliged to move into apartment housing, regardless of preference, or move away. Families may also be trapped in crowded and sub-standard housing, unable to rationalise housing needs. The result may be significant health consequences and costs (Rankine, 2005).

Taken alongside a tightening of building codes and standards, extended planning and approval processes, the costs of brownfield rehabilitation, and the expense of infrastructure renewal, containment can impact adversely on affordability (Downs, 2003). For an increasing number of households, apartment living or renting may be the only realistic options they face, now and in the future.

A compact city may only be achieved at the cost of those with the least capacity to purchase their own homes and access increasingly scarce space and amenity.

The contribution of suburban development to health and well being in post-war society (indeed, post-Industrial Revolution society) is effectively dismissed. Suburbs were not without their issues, especially in an era in which they developed to sustain Fordist industrialisation and promote mass consumption. However, building on contemporary understandings of the importance of the public realm, of amenity, design, diversity, accessibility, open space and natural environments, suburban living

continues to offer major advantages. Suburbs are also an important cultural construct within New Zealand, associated with our settler heritage, and the introduction of alternative, more intensive forms by way of infill housing, for example, raises real issues of culture and community (Vallance, Perkins and Moore, 2004).

In summary, intensification risks delivering:

- (1) Poor quality residential developments, in terms of the built environment, community development, and the quality and security of public spaces;
- (2) Differential impacts: increased densities are visited on those with least resources;
- (3) Reduced housing affordability and lower access to the amenities of suburban living for low income groups;
- (4) Potentially adverse public health outcomes: for example, for those without easy access to private or quality public space (especially children) for recreation and leisure purposes, or without the mobility (or second home) to access quality recreation environments, with poor housing conditions, exposed to excessive traffic congestion and attendant air quality and noise issues, or for whom the night-time security issues associated with apartment or high density living reduce the capacity to relax and take exercise. These possibilities need to be weighed up against the claims that the additional time spent in the car by people offsets the advantages of low density, suburban or peri-urban living.
- (5) Sharply reduced opportunities for suburban, coastal and rural living, privileging current occupiers and people with the capacity to pay.

The instruments of intensification, such as Strategic Growth Management Corridors, are likely to impact most severely on those communities that live in areas underpinned by the lowest land and capital costs. These tend to be lower decile communities that can least afford the severance, displacement and disruption consequences but may be least capable of resisting them.

In addition, failure to address the prospects for more diverse, extensive and higher quality residential development may simply mean that people seek amenity outside the Region, potentially transferring the adverse effects that the policies are intended to avoid, while reducing Auckland's long-term economic and social wellbeing.

11 Impacts on Transport:

As yet, there is no evidence of transport gains from residential intensification in Auckland, whether this is by way of substitution of public for private transport, or through fewer or shorter trips. One of the reasons is that the analysis and monitoring have not been done. It is early days, of course, and the indirect evidence is mixed.

For example, vehicle trips on the Region's arterial backbone, State Highway 1, indicate that there was already a slow-down in the rate of growth by around 2000 (Figure 1). This may illustrate the effect of reaching capacity constraints on key parts of the network, rather than a shift in demand. Certainly, Transit New Zealand reported in its *Briefing Paper* to the incoming Minister of Transport (September 2005) that in March 2005 congestion reached its highest level on record.

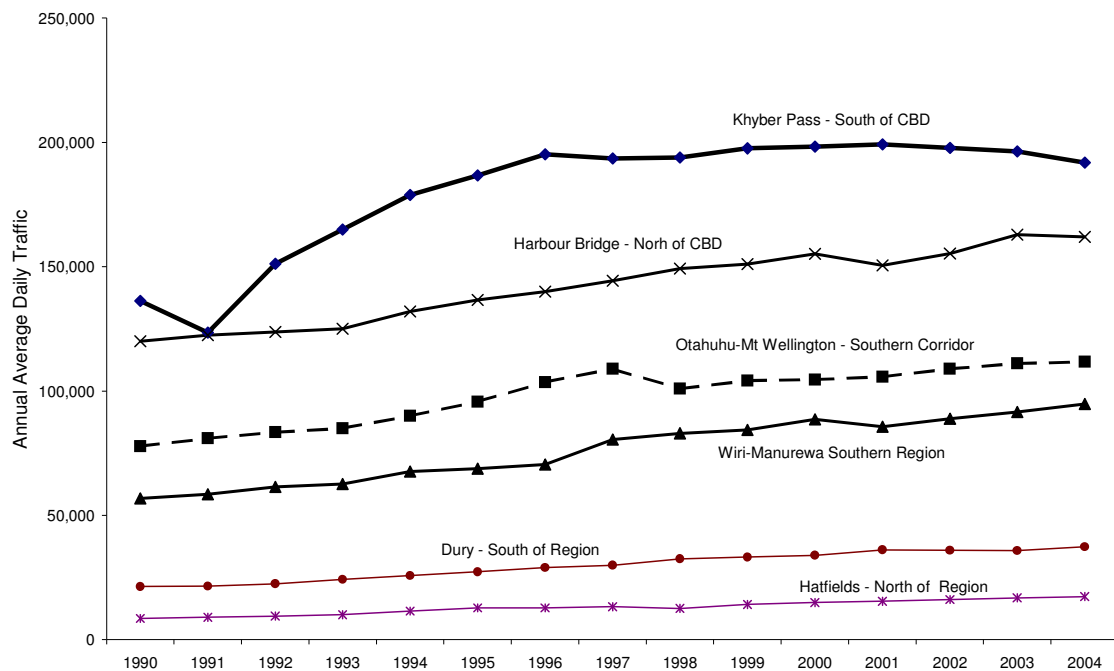


Figure 2: Trends in State Highway 1 Traffic

Source: Transit New Zealand

A major contingency with urban intensification is growing non-commuting use of the car. Retail, personal business, leisure, and school trips by households concentrated on Auckland's arterial routes or around traditional centres targeted for intensification appear to intensify congestion and reduce the efficiency of commuting corridors.

The concentration of non-work trips on key roads around the city and selected town centres exacerbates a lack of surplus network capacity in central areas. Network redundancy to cope with occasional disruption through crashes, road works or breakdowns may also be reduced by policies that aim to calm residential roads, reduce carriageway widths, and change road alignments to discourage traffic.

This contributes to a situation in which major congestion incidents are more frequent and delays longer. The disruption extends to local communities through the resulting difficulty of movement, compounding severance effects, and externalities associated with vehicle congestion.

More generally, changing demographic and socio-economic characteristics may modify car use regardless of land use regulation. The solutions may lie less obviously in land use fixes (which may be more heavily implicated in the problem than usually acknowledged), than in more direct instruments.

Congestion charging and direct road pricing have the capacity to offer immediate returns. Such measures would do much more to influence demand and therefore deliver desirable outcomes than constraining the region within Metropolitan Urban Limits, or promoting medium- to high-density living on key nodes, around arterial roads, and in mixed use business areas.

Incidentally, the increased congestion that appears to accompany high-density development may also reduce the efficiency and attractiveness of public transport alternative, unless there is a substantial and extensive investment in dedicated public transport corridors. Unfortunately, such investment in Auckland is being directed towards historical fixed route rail corridors, limiting the flexibility of public transport

that might best serve Auckland's decentralised urban form. In any case, public transport is unlikely to serve diverse trip needs that underpin much of today's growth in congestion.

Investment in rail is moving patronage from buses, but not necessarily impacting on private vehicle usage. Rail passengers were up by around 120,000 year-on-year in January 2006, a 55% increase. By way of comparison, bus patronage was down by 241,000 in December 2005, year-on-year (Auckland Regional Transport Authority, *Monthly Business Report*, January 2006). The decline was attributed to falling student numbers in the CBD, and some cannibalisation by rail.

The growth in rail patronage is hard-fought, as Auckland seeks to upgrade passenger services on the Main Trunk North-South Railway line, at an estimated cost of \$1.8 billion between 2003 and 2018 (Boston Consulting Group, 2003). This cost is bound to have escalated, and did not include the increased operating costs.

The vision for this upgrade was derived from the Regional Growth Strategy and its focus on intensifying land use on transport corridors and expanding employment in existing nodes, especially the CBD.

Overall, the Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) requires \$11 billion in funding over a decade, with \$3.7 billion, at least, committed to public transport (Auckland Regional Land Transport, 2005).

Quite apart from the appropriateness or otherwise of the content of the Regional Growth Strategy for informing such substantial commitments, its strong link with the (RLTS) raises additional issues. Land uses end up prescribed as much by public transport needs as by social, cultural, economic, or even environmental outcomes. And, there is a risk that public transport becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to an end. Land use outcomes may be driven to justify the investment in public transport.

This nexus makes it that much harder to review the efficacy of the direction Auckland is being steered in. Taken together with the Local Government (Auckland) Amendment Act, the size of the capital commitment contained in the Transport Strategy and its growing primacy in the land use-transport relationship reduces the role of planner to that of technician, and ties the hands of communities and their representatives. In Auckland, we risk promoting containment and public transport becoming the outcomes, rather being the possible (and partial) means of achieving desired outcomes,

Assuming at least some of those outcomes are environmental, the progressive renewal of the vehicle fleet promises environmental gains (in fuel efficiency and emission reduction) difficult to achieve over a comparable time horizon through policies affecting urban form.

(Admittedly, rapid gains in fuel efficiencies by US car makers in the 1970s and 1980s gave way to increased performance and vehicle size and more or less constant fuel consumption during the 1990s (Heavenrich, 2005). However, the long-term upward shift in fuel prices, issues of petroleum security and growing concern about global warming should redirect technological attention to fuel efficiency).

Some public interventions may still be needed to achieve this (for example, with respect to emission standards, or through supporting the move to hybrid or alternative fuel cars). Such intervention is likely to be more focused on outcomes and more transparent than transport infrastructure investment dependent on long-term land use constraints, and considerably more cost effective.

12 Impacts on Employment

Despite focusing on increasing accessibility to the CBD through the location of intensive housing, development on transport corridors, and development of a commuter rail service, only 12.5% of region's employees work there (an estimated 65,000 jobs in 2005, Auckland City Council), a proportion that is falling.

Employment is decentralising both inter-regionally and within Auckland. Between 2000 and 2004 employment in New Zealand grew by 16% and in Auckland by a little less, 15%. But, adjoining regions grew more rapidly; Northland grew by 23%, Bay of Plenty 21% and Waikato 19%.

The picture is more compelling in manufacturing, which grew 13% nationally over the period, but just 7% in Auckland, compared with 23% in Northland, 14% in the Bay of Plenty, and a spectacular 44% in the Waikato.

This picture of slow decentralisation is repeated within the Region. Rodney and North Shore, in the north, accounted for 16% of the Region's employment in 2000, but for 22% of its growth in the next five years. Manukau and Papakura in the south accounted for 21% of jobs in 2000 but 29% of growth to 2005. The result is that traditionally dominant Auckland City slipped from 53% to 50% of the Region's employment.

Two points can be made. First, although Auckland's dominance of employment continues, its dominance of growth rates does not. This raises questions over the population projections behind the Growth Strategy, based as they are on assumptions of migration gains supported by a healthy labour market.

Second, implementing the Strategy might be partly to blame for difficulties faced by employers seeking to expand or invest in Auckland. Employment pressures are greatest in outer suburbs with least capacity to cater for them.

The conversion of former industrial land into sites for medium density housing along the transport corridors has reduced the stock of employment land available even in inner parts of the Region. Some 45,000 potential (ARC, 2003) residential sites were identified on business land in 2001. A shortage of business land, and particularly industrial land (capable of accommodating large footprint development) is another consequence of containment.

In 2004, the draft *Business Location Strategy* noted that:

Vacant business land capacity is being exhausted at a more rapid rate [than residential capacity] with only small supplies now remaining in the west and north. Based on the last period of up-take there may only be 13 years remaining in the region – and less than 10 years in the west and north.

Continuing strong growth and a current review of the figures suggest that even this figure may be optimistic.³

Given that what is theoretically available is, in any case, substantially more than what is likely to be released to the market, and given the difficulty of matching specific investor needs to particular parcels and premises, tight supply is already pushing land prices up and potentially investment out of the Region ("Industrial land in short supply", *New Zealand Herald*, 15 October 2005).

³ This issue is currently being addressed by the Regional and territorial councils.

13 Conclusion

The central instruments of smart growth – compact cities, intensification, reuse, pedestrianisation, and privileging public transport – may raise more issues than they resolve in the Auckland Region.

They may be inappropriate for a number of reasons. Those canvassed in this paper include the underlying assumptions and uncertainties about how much growth will take place, the nature of that growth and its impact on ethnic diversity, the frustration of housing preferences, and impacts on economic activity.

Despite these issues and uncertainties, there is no evidence yet that increasing densities within Auckland benefits energy use or environmental outcomes. Lifting congestion in inner parts of the Region may have the opposite outcome. At the same time, economic activity can be prejudiced by increased rigidities in the land market and by increased congestion. Declining housing affordability raises questions of social equity and justice. Because of its impact on low decile communities and low-income households, there is a possibility that high-density living is associated with increased public health problems and social dislocation.

Although smart growth is promoted as all-things-to-all-people and promulgated in terms of rural and urban outcomes, there is a risk that it reduces flexibility.

The ARGS was conceived as a living document for shaping consensus on how the regional and territorial councils could align policies to manage environmental outcomes. Implicit was a process of learning, collaboration and change management. Instead, it has become enshrined in legislation and potentially captive to the capital expenditure committed to transport infrastructure. It has been transformed into a blueprint with limited capacity to respond to community preferences or to information suggesting that alternative policies may be more effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

In Summary:

Unwillingness to consider modification of MULs from time to time, a prescriptive approach to population densities, and limits on infill in established suburbs fly in the face of emerging evidence of counter-urbanisation and carry with them potentially adverse social consequences, through, for example, their impact on housing affordability and community severance.

The underlying instruments of community intensification may fail to reflect increasing ethnic diversity. In a multi-cultural environment there are challenges for urban design and management relating to housing, the public realm and community facilities. The tendency to apply common principles to different communities (through, for example, the liveable communities programme) is fraught with challenges.

Adverse economic impacts could arise from the possibility of low productivity of investment in infrastructure, and escalation of costs facing business.

The push towards compact cities is taking place just as demographics, technology, economic organisation and prosperity are converging to support decentralisation. Decentralisation is something that regional and national policy makers have long sought. It is a valid response to the diseconomies that may beset the ageing of advanced metropolitan areas.

It also takes up physical, social and economic infrastructure threatened by the decline of primary sector activities, and brings new and potentially more environmentally benevolent investment into the countryside. The real challenge may not be to stem this tide, but to ensure that it can be directed towards low impact, sustainable outcomes (Gurran, Squires, Blakely, 2005).

Regardless of counter-urbanisation, it is in the suburbs that the majority of residents of many if not most western cities dwell; and it is in the suburbs that many new households aspire to live. Policies which choke the supply of new suburbs by turning their backs on that most exciting and creative of spaces, the urban edge (Fien, 2005) risk abandoning cities' bodies while purporting to nurture their souls. The instant gratification offered by intensifying and containing cities may well be at the cost of environmental sustainability and quality of life. Smart growth policies may undermine the qualities that they aspire to preserve, and in doing so undermine the growth that they seek to manage.

It is to be hoped that these prospects and possibilities are given careful consideration in the forthcoming review of the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy.

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