

URBPLAN321 – Assignment 2 – Group Report
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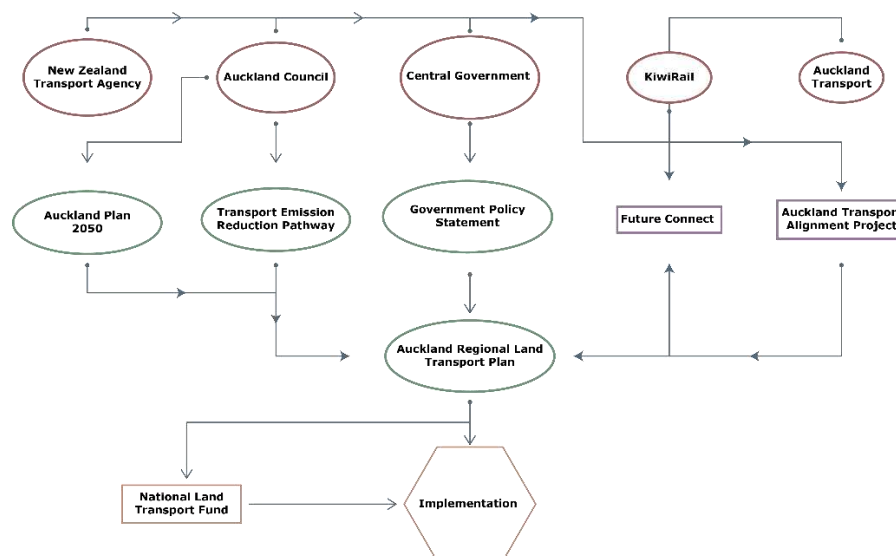
Introduction

Auckland experiences persistent traffic congestion. Congestion occurs when the travel demand is not adequately served by road capacity. (ARUP & EY, 2025) Congestion poses a major issue for Auckland, as increased travel times lead to high costs; by 2026, Auckland will annually be losing a total of \$2.6B from time-related opportunity costs, macro-economic factors such as disrupted supply chains and the accessibility of labour and pools, and increased emissions (ARUP & EY, 2025).

Several transport policies have been created to address congestion and realise the potential of Auckland's sustained population growth. The Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (GPS-LT) is a central government policy that directs strategic investment and priorities in land transport at the highest policy level. The Auckland Plan 2050 (AP) and Transport Emissions Reduction Pathway (TERP) are regional policies set by the Auckland Council (AC) that aim to shape future urban growth and transportation patterns by setting a long-term vision for Auckland. The Auckland Regional Land Transport Plan (ARLTP) sits lowest on the policy hierarchy and aids in implementing the priorities of the GPS-LT, AP, and TERP.

This report critically evaluates the intersections and contradictions of these policies to evaluate how effective they are at progressing toward the goal of decongestion in Auckland.

Figure 1: Policy Hierarchy



Note. Author's work

Context

Government Policy Statement on Land Transport

The GPS-LT is a strategic policy document developed by the central government and informed by the Land Transport Management Act 2003 (LTMA); Its purpose is to set national land transport goals and priorities for the next 10 years, guide investment of funds from the National Land Transport Fund (NLTF) and provide direction to NZTA and local authorities about what the government expects from various land transport initiatives (New Zealand Government, 2024).

The GPS-LT has various goals and objectives. These goals are to ensure economic growth; make our land transport safer by reducing traffic deaths and serious injuries; plan redundancies to improve resilience and sustainability, accounting for climate change and economic downfalls; improve the access and liveability of our cities through public transport, cycling, and walking improvements; ensure transport spending is allocated efficiently, effectively, and transparently; and guide local and regional transport plans, such as the ARLTP, by setting expectations (New Zealand Government, 2024). The importance of the different goals and objectives of the GPS-LT is changed and adjusted based on the objectives of the government in power.

In previous iterations, the GPS-LT based its planning on various types of evidence and information gathering. Transport data, such as congestion levels, crash statistics, and maintenance reports, is used to understand what needs to be fixed or improved now. Traffic modelling and forecasting are used to identify areas under stress that will require improvement in the near future (Ministry of Transport, 2022). Finally, public and stakeholder consultations play an important role: understanding what people want for their communities helps shape outcomes that better reflect public preferences.

Under the current GPS-LT, traffic congestion is one of the major issues being addressed. The government is placing special emphasis on roading infrastructure by improving existing networks and delivering new roads and highways; these efforts aim to improve journey times, increase travel time reliability, and enhance access to markets and employment areas, all while reducing congestion (New Zealand Government, 2024).

The government plans to achieve this by reintroducing the Roads of National and Regional Significance (RoNS/RS), roading projects that are identified as vital to New Zealand's

economic growth, productivity, and safety (New Zealand Government, 2024). One proposed example in Auckland is the East-West Link, which would connect SH20 with SH1 through Onehunga and Te Papapa. However, the reintroduction of RoNS/RS has been heavily criticised for being extremely car-centric, with many projects having low benefit-cost ratios (Greater Auckland, 2024). This raises questions about the program's stated goals. How are RoNS/RS expected to alleviate traffic congestion and stimulate the economy while increasing car dependency and advancing projects with limited economic benefit?

Auckland Plan 2050/TERP

Auckland Plan 2050

The Auckland Plan 2050 (AP) is the Auckland region's long-term spatial plan. Released in 2018, with a 30-year horizon to 2050. It is required under the Local Government (Auckland Council) Act 2009. The legal purpose of the AP is to 'contribute to Auckland's social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing.'

The AP sets a high-level strategic direction to tackle Auckland's key challenges of population growth, environmental degradation and quality of life for Aucklanders. (Auckland Council, 2018).

To guide implementation, the AP has 6 outcomes for Auckland's future. Most relevant to traffic congestion is Outcome 4, 'Transport and Access'. The objective is for a 'low-carbon, safe transport system that delivers social, economic and health benefits for all.' (Auckland Council, 2018)

Notably, the Auckland plan does not contain detailed actions, detailed implementation falls to the TERP, which the AP identifies as critical to the monitoring and evaluation of the APs goals and outcomes

TERP

The Transport Emissions Reduction Pathway (TERP) is a pathway to reduce Auckland's transport emissions and congestion in line with Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri: Auckland's Climate Plan.

Released in 2022, the objective of the TERP is to reduce Auckland's transport emissions by 64% by 2030. To achieve this, the TERP has

11 Transformational Areas:

1. Supercharge walking and cycling
2. Use public transport much more
3. Prioritise and resource sustainable transport
4. Reduce travel where possible and appropriate
5. Make neighbourhoods safer with less traffic
6. Put things closer to where people live
7. Electrify private vehicles
8. Enable new transport devices
9. Make buses, trains and ferries low emissions
10. Make freight and services cleaner and more efficient
11. Help Aucklanders to make sustainable transport choices

The Auckland Climate Plan (Auckland Council, 2020) provides the evidence base for TERPs transformations. Primarily, this was the necessary emissions reductions required to prevent 1.5c of warming by 2030. Which was informed by the NZ Government and Auckland Council's declared climate emergencies (Auckland Council, n.d.), (New Zealand Parliament, 2020)

Auckland Regional Land Transport Plan

The ARLTP sets out the land transport objectives for the next 10 years in the Auckland region. It represents the Auckland regions bid for funding from the NLTF for land transport projects by Auckland Transport (AT), NZTA, and KiwiRail. The ARLTP must comply with the GPS-LT by law (Auckland Transport et al., 2024). The projects considered outweigh the available funding, therefore, projects are ranked and allocated funding according to their ability to achieve the plan's strategic priorities (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

The primary objectives of the ARLTP are to achieve a fast and reliable public transport network and a resilient land transport network that supports economic productivity, improved safety, and continued decarbonisation of the transport fleet (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

The ARLTP involves a three-stage process. First, projects are categorised as discretionary or non-discretionary. Non-discretionary projects are then automatically proposed capital investments at the highest level. Finally, a multi-agency working group ranks the priority of discretionary projects based on strategic alignment (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

Proposed funding includes:

- Non-discretionary spending:
 - The renewal of public transport services.
 - Finishing off projects already under construction. Including:
 - City Rail Link
 - Eastern Busway
- Discretionary spending:
 - (1) Public transport projects.
 - (2) Cycling network projects.
 - (3) Local road optimisation projects.
 - (4) State Highway projects.

The ARLTP uses the Auckland Transport Alignment Project (ATAP) and Future Connect (FC) as its evidential base (Auckland Transport et al., 2024). FC is a data-driven, repeatable

process that analyses deficiencies and maps potential opportunities in the transport network (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

The ATAP uses transport modelling to forecast different land use and transport scenarios based on the Auckland Plan development strategy for 2026, 2036 and 2046 (Ministry of Transport, 2021). Reliance on ATAP and FC highlights the risk of flawed assumptions in modelling. The ATAP modelling process was severely constrained by staff, funding and time availability, raising questions about the accuracy of models (Ministry of Transport, n.d.).

The ARLTP proposes public transport projects, such as the Northwest Rapid Transit project, whilst also acknowledging that public transport projects are at risk of underfunding due to the strategic direction of the GPS-LT (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

Analysis

Interconnections & contradictions

Significant interconnections exist between the ARLTP, AP, TERP, and GPS-LT. The ARLTP must legally align with the GPS-LT under the LTMA. However, the ARLTP must simultaneously align itself with the TERP, a legally binding policy with significantly different objectives from the GPS-LT, and the AP, a non-statutory planning document with significantly different urban growth strategies from that of the GPS-LT (Auckland Council, 2018, 2021; Auckland Transport et al., 2024; New Zealand Government, 2024).

The highest policy, the GPS-LT, significantly disagrees with the AP and TERP in how to best manage transport emissions. The AP and TERP urge reprioritisation of funding to public and active modes of transport to achieve significant mode shift and decarbonisation of the transportation system and the integration of land use with transportation to reduce car dependency and travel demand, whilst the GPS-LT believes that the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) is the primary tool for addressing emissions and that mode shift and decarbonisation should not be prioritised for funding (Auckland Council, 2018, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2024)..

Moreover, the GPS-LT proposes funding significant State Highway improvements through the RON/RS. However, the AP & TERP discourage spending on State Highways, as they believe the network is complete following the Western Ring Route upgrades and that the funding would be better spent on improving public transportation systems. The RON/RS soak up a significant portion of the proposed funding from the NLTF, leaving little funding to be allocated to public and active transport activity classes (Auckland Council, 2018, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2024)..

The ARLTP, therefore, faces a challenging prospect, having to align itself with multiple higher-level policies with conflicting objectives. The ARLTP aligns itself with the GPS-LT in proposed funding for projects; however, it acknowledges the contradictory objectives and

emphasises the belief that mode shift and decarbonisation are important long-term strategic outcomes that must be pursued (Auckland Transport et al., 2024).

The issue of urban growth patterns is another source of contention. The AP states that one of the main reasons for congestion in Auckland is a sprawling urban form that entrenches car dependency. Due to this, the AP and TERP promote a compact city development pattern where development is centred around nodes of rapid transit stations, helping to provide alternative transportation choices and allowing people to live closer to where they work, reducing travel demand. However, the GPS-LT believes that the RON/RS will boost economic growth by unlocking land for residential development and embracing a greenfield development approach, which the AP and TERP are critical of as the root of Auckland's congestion (Auckland Council, 2018, 2021; New Zealand Government, 2024).

This tension leaves AC and AT in a position where they must either self-fund key public transport projects or compromise their long-term goals and spatial plans for urban growth (Auckland Transport et al., 2024). Therefore, whilst the ALTRP aligns with the GPS-LT due to being legally required to, the ALTRP is being significantly undermined by the GPS-LT in pursuing its stated objectives.

Weaknesses in methodology

The ALTRP has a relatively sophisticated methodology. It relies on the ATAP and FC policies as its evidential base for modelling. Aside from modelling adopted from the ATAP and FC, the ARLTP utilised public feedback and engagement with stakeholders in the form of a multi-agency working group. This working group grades individual projects against the proposed objectives of the ARLTP and develops a ranking for funding prioritisation (Auckland Transport et al., 2024). The main weakness in the methodology of the ARLTP is the risks associated with relying on modelling. Modelling can lead to risks, as the assumptions embedded in these transport models could be wrong, such as potential future growth patterns.

The AP and TERP rely more on stakeholder engagement and higher-level planning alongside future growth and emissions modelling. (Auckland Council, 2018, 2021).

The GPS-LT also exhibits weak methodology. Whilst the plan is developed alongside consideration of modelling, this evidential base is not provided to the public (Greater Auckland, 2024). Moreover, the methodology of the GPS-LT seems weak due to contradictory claims within the policy itself; it promotes efficiency in transport spending whilst committing to funding the RON/RS, many of which have middling benefit-cost ratios. The lack of a publicly available evidential base and conflicting claims within the policy significantly undermine the credibility of the GPS-LT as an evidence-led policy and point to the issue of transport becoming politicised. The politicisation of transport has led to weak methodologies and contradictions within and between policies.

Suggestions & Conclusion

The analysis of the hierarchy for land transport has demonstrated a significant misalignment between the objectives and proposed solutions of policies operating at different scales.

Moreover, significant deficiencies in methodology have been identified, which pose a significant risk to the progression of decongestion in Auckland, as some proposed solutions, such as the RoN/RS, have not been developed through rigorous evidence-based research. The foremost issue at hand is the politicisation of transport. Amending the LMTA to require the GPS-LT to be accompanied by a publicly available evidential base could potentially address this by increasing government transparency and accountability. Moreover, a revision to the ATAP, with a more robust methodology, could be developed to inform future GPS-LT and ARLTP better.

Furthermore, no policy explicitly states the implementation of congestion charging as a priority. Congestion charging has been proven to be highly effective in curbing demand for travel whilst providing an additional funding source for further transport improvements. Including congestion charging in all policies could aid its implementation and decongestion.

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