The Treasury

Auckland Light Rail Project Information Release

March 2022

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TE TAI ŌHANGA
THE TREASURY

Treasury Report: City Centre to Māngere light rail business case - Treasury review

Date:	21 October 2021	**Report No:**	T2021/2570
		File Number:	SH-8-4-1-4

Action sought

	Action sought	Deadline
Minister of Finance (Hon Grant Robertson)	Discuss the contents of the report with the Minister of Transport and Minister of Housing Refer the report to the Minister of Transport and Minister of Housing	Tuesday 26 October 2021

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone		1st Contact
Erana Sitterle	Senior Analyst, National Infrastructure Unit (NIU)	[35]	N/A (mob)	✓
David Taylor	Manager, National Infrastructure Unit (NIU)	[39]	N/A (mob)	

Minister's Office actions (if required)

Return the signed report to Treasury.

Note any feedback on the quality of the report

Enclosure: No

Treasury Report: City Centre to Māngere light rail business case - Treasury review

Executive Summary

This report provides you with a summary of the Treasury's review of the City Centre to Māngere/Auckland Light Rail indicative business case. In undertaking our review, we have focused on the robustness of the case, the likelihood of the project's success given its current implementation plan and the specific recommended option set out.

The City Centre to Mangere/Auckland Light Rail Establishment Unit (Establishment Unit) has provided its finalised indicative business case in accordance with the March 2021 Cabinet directive [CBC-21-MIN-0036 refers]. We note that the indicative business case has been finalised without the benefit of the Gateway review and feedback. The Establishment Unit has recommended the 'partly tunnelled light rail' option (with the exact route, especially through the central Isthmus (Sandringham Road or Dominion Road), and length of tunnelling to be explored with the community during the next project phase). The Establishment Unit based this recommendation on the high level of urban growth potential, lower level of disruption during construction (compared to surface running light rail), ability to integrate with an assumed tunnel to the North Shore (as part of the Additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing project) and lower costs than the light metro option.

The indicative business case frames the project as a conventional transport project. The economic case shows that only half of the modelled project benefits relate to traditional transport benefits such as travel time savings or reliability benefits. The other half of project benefits relate to wider economic benefits, such as productivity benefits from increased access to employment and other benefits from urban intensification. All options have a benefit-cost ratio of around one, which means that there is little 'margin for error' for cost overruns or benefit underruns. Modelling shows that benefits tend to be higher if greater urban redevelopment can be achieved, and lower if it cannot. The full range of interventions needed to achieve higher levels of redevelopment, such as changes to urban planning controls or increases in water infrastructure capacity, have not been identified, analysed or costed at this stage. Based on the lack of detail provided on how urban development will be achieved, we have low confidence that these benefits will be realised, resulting in poor public value.

Notwithstanding this uncertainty, the Treasury considers that there is a case for the project if it is progressed as an integrated transport infrastructure and urban redevelopment scheme, where the project takes a deliberate and measured approach in securing urban development and the benefits that flow from it. Given the scale of the housing and urban development and climate mitigation challenges facing Auckland, this would support the pursuit of broader benefits. Implementing such an approach may require leadership by an urban development authority of some form that has a strong local community mandate.

To give the project the best chance of success, we recommend that decisions on route and mode are deferred at this point in time given insufficient urban analysis, social licence and robust cost information. Analysis on route and mode options should take into account the level of support for intensification; this relies on establishing community mandates from alternative routes (e.g. Sandringham Road or Dominion Road), which means the route should not be predetermined in advance. Taking the time now to get the design and alignment right, in a process that follows international best practice and includes stakeholders in its development, will ultimately speed up delivery.

On the specific recommended option of tunnelled light rail, we have previously advised that we do not consider the key factors influencing the Establishment Unit's position (urban growth potential, disruption and ability to integrate with the North Shore) sufficiently support the recommended option, over the surface running light rail option (T2021/2470 refers).

If the project proceeds to detailed business case, we recommend a decision is not taken on a preferred option now and the three shortlisted options are taken through for further analysis. We further recommend that, if Cabinet agrees to proceed to detailed business case, this is done on the basis that the project is an integrated urban and transport scheme, and clear expectations are set on the level of analysis and engagement needed to address the urban outcomes. As the first stage of the detailed business case, but before route and mode decisions are taken, we recommend:

- further engagement is undertaken with the communities along the corridor to understand the level of social licence for both the transport and urban objectives
- the strategic case is revisited to properly reflect the drivers of the project being both transport and urban issues
- the detail of the required urban interventions, including an implementation pathway, is developed
- further design work is undertaken to facilitate more robust cost estimates
- options for staging the route development are developed

Once these activities have been undertaken, Cabinet will be in a much better position to make route and mode decisions, before proceeding with the completion of the detailed business case.

Recommended Action

We recommend that you:

a **agree** to discuss the content of this report with the Minister of Transport and Minister of Housing

Agree/disagree.

b **refer** this report to the Minister of Transport and Minister of Housing

Refer/not referred.

David Taylor
Manager, National Infrastructure Unit

Hon Grant Robertson
Minister of Finance

Treasury Report: City Centre to Mangere light rail business case - Treasury review

Purpose of Report

1. The City Centre to Māngere(CC2M)/Auckland Light Rail Establishment Unit (Establishment Unit) has now provided its completed indicative business case to officials and Ministers. This report provides you with a summary of the Treasury's review to assist you in considering whether to accept the indicative business case.

2. This advice builds on our previous analysis that we have outlined in the Project Sponsor meeting briefings (T2021/1504, T2021/1998, T2021/2359 and T2021/2470 refers).

Background

3. On 29 March 2021, the Cabinet Business Committee, having been authorised by Cabinet to have Power to Act [CAB-21-MIN-0094]:

   a **Agreed** that an Establishment Unit be set up and tasked with progressing the following work over a six-month period:

      i Completing business case work to inform future advice to Cabinet

      ii Undertaking initial iwi, stakeholder and community engagement

      iii Preparing advice on the form and governance arrangements for the delivery entity for the project

      iv Preparing advice on the options to take the project forward, including mode, alignment, and decision gateways

      v Supporting and informing, as required, policy work undertaken by policy agencies

   b **Agreed** that the Minister of Finance and Minister of Transport be the project sponsors, alongside representation from Auckland local government;

   c **Invited** the Minister of Transport, in consultation with relevant portfolio Ministers, to report back to the Economic Development Committee (DEV) in November 2021 with:

      i Further advice based on the business case and recommendations on a preferred way forward, including route, mode, funding and financing, and the form of a delivery entity

      ii Recommendations based on the detailed policy positions developed with respect to the project, including legislative and regulatory changes that are needed to take implementation of the project forward [CBC-21-MIN-0036 refers].

4. As a project Sponsor, the Establishment Unit provided your office with a final version of the indicative business case on Monday 18 October 2021, as well as the independent Chair's report (which is essentially a summary of the business case).

Establishment Unit recommendations

5. In line with the March 2021 Cabinet directive, the Establishment Unit has provided recommendations on route, mode, delivery entity options and next steps for funding and financing. The summary of these conclusions and recommendations are set out in the table below.

<table>
<tr><td>Route and mode</td><td>As outlined in our previous meeting briefing (T2021/2470), the Establishment Unit Board has endorsed, as a majority decision, the recommended option of 'partly tunnelled light rail' (with the exact route, especially through the central Isthmus (Sandringham Road or Dominion Road), and length of tunnelling to be explored with the community during the next project phase).

The following key factors strongly influenced this decision:
Urban growth potential (The Unit has recommended the option with the highest urban growth potential)
Level of construction disruption (The Unit has focused on the level of disruption on Queen Street and Dominion Road, for the surface light rail option, and favoured the option with less surface level disruption)
Ability to integrate with the future rapid transit network to the North Shore and North West of Auckland (The Unit has assumed that the Additional Waitemata Harbour Crossing to the North Shore will be tunnelled, and that a tunnel under the city centre is necessary to integrate with this assumed future North Shore tunnel)
We have previously advised you that we do not consider that these factors sufficiently support the recommended option over the surface running light rail option (T2021/2470 refers).

The Board also noted that the surface running light rail scheme is 'also an attractive scheme which meets the investment objectives with a lower cost'. The recommended route, if this option were chosen, would be Dominion Road.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Delivery entity</td><td>The Establishment Unit has identified two possible options that it considers capable of delivering the project:
A new purpose-designed Schedule 4a (S4a) company or
Waka Kotahi (through an internal business unit or subsidiary)
Overall, the Establishment Unit has recommended that the choice of final delivery entity is kept open at this point. The purpose of this would be to allow further clarity on route and mode, the associated urban development opportunities and required interventions, appetite in relation to risk and control of urban outcomes, and the role of the delivery entity and its partners in delivering the outcomes.

In the interim, the Establishment Unit has recommended that a 'Transition Unit' within Waka Kotahi is established (either as a subsidiary or business unit) to advance the project and agree and establish a governance structure.</td></tr>
</table>

Funding and financing	The Board endorsed the use of an Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act (IFF) levy and noted: • Local and regional beneficiaries can make a meaningful funding contribution through leveraging existing, or new, value capture tools • Nevertheless, the Crown will be required to fund the majority of the costs of the project • There are opportunities to seek to recover some of that Crown funding contribution through urban redevelopment

Summary of the Treasury's review

6. We have reviewed the indicative business case and various appendices that the Establishment Unit has provided, including transport modelling, economic appraisal methodology, land value uplift appraisals and methodology for land use scenarios. The focus of our review has been on testing the robustness of the case made for the project and the strength of the specific recommendations made.

7. We have worked closely with Te Waihanga in undertaking this review, and there is alignment on the conclusions we have reached.

8. We also note that the Treasury Gateway review is yet to be completed (this is due to take place in the week commencing 1 November). We expect that the Gateway assurance process will identify a number of issues that the finalised indicative business case will not have had the benefit of addressing.

The strategic case is focused on the transport intervention, which won't achieve the desired broader outcomes in isolation

9. The purpose of the strategic case is to make the case for change and provide a clear understanding of the rationale, drivers and objectives for the proposal, including problems it is seeking to solve. At this stage, the business case should not jump to a solution (which will be considered in the economic case, as various options are assessed).

10. While the strategic case in this situation does outline that the rapid transit solution alone will not be enough to deliver the full urban development outcomes sought, the focus is on the transport intervention, treating the urban development and wider benefits as complementary (rather than integral to the project). There is a lack of detail about what the required urban interventions could be, and what role they would need to play in addressing the problems identified.

11. International research[1] has identified that there has been a tendency for public transport planning studies and business cases to be overly focused on mode specific projects (e.g. rail, light rail, metro or bus rapid transit). This is instead of undertaking an objective analysis of the benefits that might be offered by different, integrated modes across an individual corridor. This can have several negative consequences, including:

    a. a lack of a thorough assessment of the strengths and weaknesses that different modes might offer in meeting the outcomes sought by an intervention;

    b. the focus can move away from meeting specific mobility or development objectives;

[1] 'Integrating Australia's Transport Systems: A Strategy for an Efficient Transport Future', Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, 2016: Integrating-Australias-Transport-Systems_IPA_BoozCo_FINAL-1.pdf (infrastructure.org.au)

c without a firm basis for a modal decision, and a rational discussion about the relative modal merits, a project can be vulnerable to greater criticism from detractors.

12. Our view is that the strategic case for this project has some of these characteristics, which could move the focus away from the real problems along the corridor that require solutions.

The economic assessment of the project indicates that the public value of the project as a transport intervention, without large scale intensive urban redevelopment, is marginal

13. As the business case sets out, traditional transport benefits comprise only about 50 percent of the total project benefits. The rest of the benefits are 'wider economic benefits', which are predominantly agglomeration benefits (improved productivity), due to improved connections between two large employment hubs (the city centre and the airport).

14. While we note that the ratio between traditional transport benefits and wider economic benefits is high relative to past projects, we have reviewed the detailed modelling and are broadly comfortable that the analysis is in line with current Waka Kotahi guidance. We also note that a member of the assurance panel (an economist from Australia who has reviewed numerous rapid transit and light rail business cases) also highlighted this high ratio, querying whether some of the wider economic benefits would occur in the base case already, given the high amount of expenditure committed and funded to date (through the Auckland Transport Alignment Project).

15. We acknowledge that part of the problem is that the existing economic evaluation techniques used are ill-suited to capturing the full benefits of land use change from large transport infrastructure projects such as this one. We are discussing this matter with the Ministry of Transport, Waka Kotahi and Te Waihanga to consider what is needed to improve these evaluation methodologies.

16. As outlined to you previously (T2021/2359 refers), the project's benefits will largely fall to landowners along the corridor, primarily reflected in higher land values. This is a result of increased accessibility and amenity along the corridor due to the new transport infrastructure, meaning that there is a lot of potential for redevelopment along the corridor.

17. However, the land use analysis undertaken by the Establishment Unit indicates that the majority (at least 70 percent) of the growth in the high intensification land use scenario (which is the basis for the headline additional dwelling numbers of 20,000 to 35,000 for the surface light rail and tunnelled light rail options, respectively) is attributable to urban development interventions, not the transport intervention.

18. Urban development interventions can be implemented regardless of mode and will require a deliberate approach. Such interventions include upzoning, land acquisition and aggregation, master-planning and 'packaging' development opportunities. These types of interventions should catalyse development in non-market attractive locations, and would likely involve investment in other infrastructure and amenities that may be needed to support redevelopment, such as water infrastructure or urban parks and schools.

19. While the business case recognises this point, at this stage, there is no analysis of which of these urban interventions should be deployed (e.g. how or in which specific locations along the corridor, the costs involved, or the likely effectiveness to achieve the ambitious housing growth outlined).

20. The recently announced Resource Management (Enabling Housing Supply and Other Matters) Amendment Bill, which will bring in new intensification rules, has not been factored into the land use analysis in the business case. We expect incrementally larger population size and density along the corridor, increasing the demand, and therefore benefits, for a rapid transit solution. While the exact impact has not yet been assessed, we would expect it to be relatively modest.

21. While we are supportive of the level of ambition, this needs to be balanced with objective analysis of how feasible this ambition is, which is not set out in the documentation we have been provided.

We consider there is a case to pursue the project as an integrated transport infrastructure and urban development scheme

22. As outlined above, the indicative business case is based on the project being a transport project first and foremost. This is clear from the fact that there is no analysis of the impact of specific urban interventions, no costs of these interventions, and the consenting strategy does not consider how the transport and urban interventions would be consented as an integrated intervention.

23. We support efforts to progress the appraisal of interventions such as this project given the scale of the housing affordability problem and climate change mitigation requirements. We also consider that the project could be economically viable if it can induce large scale intensive redevelopment. However, our view is that the case to pursue the project is based on it being a fully integrated transport infrastructure and urban development project.

24. Approaching the project as an integrated urban development project would require thinking differently about how decisions on the project are made, specifically on route and mode. Stating a preferred mode and route is a natural early step for a pure transport project. However, if these decisions are taken now, it would remove the ability to test the appetite and social licence for significant intensification with landowners along the route options (e.g. Dominion Road or Sandringham Road), which means there will be zero bargaining power with these communities (which is important to drive higher benefits and better outcomes).

To set the project up for success, there is a need to build social licence and support for intensification before choosing route and mode

25. The public engagement report that the Establishment Unit has provided states that only 37 percent of all respondents support density or intensification along the corridor. This may in part be due to the fact the focus on engagement was on the transport benefits of the project, rather than the urban benefits.

26. We consider that, to successfully achieve the integrated transport and urban outcomes sought, there is a need to better engage the communities along the two proposed central isthmus routes (Sandringham Road and Dominion Road). The purpose of this would be to identify which route will have more social licence for an intensive urban redevelopment project (with complementary, integrated transport enhancements), and therefore lead to good public value.

27. This would then lead to decisions on route (as it would identify which route is value optimising and has more social licence) and mode (as it would lead to better understanding of what capacity is needed to support the forecast intensification).

28. The sort of intensive redevelopment envisaged is more ambitious than anything contemplated in recent years, and would require a strong mandate, project champions and some form of Urban Development Authority using powers under the Urban Development Act 2020.

There is very little margin for cost increases

29. As we have outlined previously (T2021/2470 refers), the primary purpose of the costs (and benefits) at the indicative business case stage is to provide an order of magnitude indication for comparative analysis, rather than to be relied upon to represent what the actual benefits and costs will be.

30. It is useful to note the following that the Establishment Unit has outlined, to give more context to the current cost estimates:

    a the level of accuracy of costs outlined in the business case have been assessed at approximately -50% and +60%;

    b the base estimate figures are likely to increase during the design development. These should be contained within the current P50 estimate, [25]

31. Given the marginal nature of the benefit cost ratio (the indicative business case sets these out as sitting very close to one, including both conventional transport benefits and wider economic benefits), this means that there is likely very little margin for cost increases (that does not involve commensurate increases in benefits).

32. The Establishment Unit has provided benchmarks to compare the capital costs of this project against other international rapid transit projects, which shows that the cost estimates provided fall within the international range. However, there is insufficient information provided to be able to use the benchmarking information to get confidence in the cost estimates (for example, it is hard to understand the difference in costs between modes, or based on different geological environments, which is likely to be a significant risk for this project).

33. Further scrutiny is particularly needed in two areas:

    a **project design and costs** – [25] this suggests that the design is highly uncertain at this stage;

    b **staging of route development** – this is important to manage cost risk on the project and provides stage gates for the project, although further work is needed to have confidence that each stage is viable as a standalone project.

34. Due to the uncertainty on the level of cost for the project, we recommend that Ministers do not commit to a solution within a prescribed cost envelope at this stage. Doing so may create expectations for project delivery that are unrealistic within a funding envelope. It is useful to note at this stage that, as the project proceeds through a detailed business case and the design stages, there will be future opportunities for value engineering solutions and project phasing to help manage project cost and overall affordability.

We have provided order of magnitude impact of net core Crown debt levels

35. Below are the estimated nominal construction costs for the recommended option, as well as the surface running light rail option, based on construction completion in 2032/33, and a range of project costs as a percentage of GDP (as at 30 June 2021).

	Partly tunnelled light rail (Unit recommended option)	Surface running light rail
P50	\$14.6 billion	\$9.0 billion
[25]		

Project costs as % of GDP (percentage point increase in net core Crown debt-to-GDP)	4.3% – 6.9%	2.6% – 4.0%

36. To calculate project costs as a percentage of GDP, we have used the nominal GDP figure of $340 billion for 30 June 2021. We are providing these costs as scenarios to give an order of magnitude, rather than as a reliable estimate of actual project costs. We have assumed for the purposes of these calculations that all expenditure is capital at this time, but this will depend on ultimate ownership of the transport assets (while there is a current working assumption that this will be Auckland Transport, this is yet to be confirmed).

37. Regardless of the eventual accounting treatment for this expenditure, you have the option of managing it against the capital allowance. However, any subsequent operating expenses (such as a write-down in the value of any Crown assets) would have a direct impact on OBEGAL as the capital allowance built into the forecasts does not manage OBEGAL impacts.

Decisions should be taken now on delivery entity and governance arrangements

38. We recommend that decisions are taken now on the form of the delivery entity. If a Waka Kotahi option is to be progressed, we consider that the best approach is to establish a subsidiary (rather than a business unit within Waka Kotahi). The key reasons for this include a subsidiary will:

    a provide the ability to leverage Waka Kotahi’s corporate services and broader resources;

    b support a clear focus on the project (rather than competing for focus alongside other business units within Waka Kotahi);

    c facilitate development of the necessary capability for the project, including its brand, approach to stakeholder engagement, and need for focus on urban development as well as transport outcomes;

    d enable directors to be appointed early in the process with Crown approval, which will likely enhance early buy-in to the key early decisions, and avoid the risk of uncertainty and delay that can occur if directors are appointed later in the development and implementation of the project;

    e allow rights and obligations in relation to the project to be created and held by the subsidiary, rather than Waka Kotahi.

39. As we have outlined in paragraph 28 above, we consider there will be a need to deploy powers under the Urban Development Act 2020. The next stage of work will need to consider which entity deploys these powers and how it is fully integrated with the planning for the transport infrastructure (for example, it could be Kāinga Ora, or alternatively it could be Auckland Council’s urban regeneration arm, Eke Panuku Development Auckland, which could be preferred to get better buy-in from Auckland Council and Aucklanders more generally).

40. We consider that the proposed governance arrangements set out in the business case will provide a good basis to establish clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. As we have outlined previously, best practice governance and a strong and capable management team will go a long way to set the project up for success. Key next steps will involve identification of a Board chair and other directors, and reaching agreement with Auckland Council on areas of commitment needed to successfully progress the project. With many jurisdictions undertaking large transport infrastructure programmes, including many rail projects, New Zealand will be competing for similar skilled resources to lead this project. It is therefore important to set up robust governance arrangements and a clear project mandate to be able to attract the requisite skilled professionals.

We recommend that Cabinet is asked to provide a mandate to investigate specific value capture tools

41. We also agree with the broad conclusions reached by the Establishment Unit on funding and value capture. However, as previously outlined, consideration of an IFF levy to contribute funding to the project needs to be weighed against the following considerations:

    a. an IFF levy is predominantly designed to fund enabling infrastructure needed to realise additional urban development capacity (such as three waters, other utilities, or other transport infrastructure), the costs of which are yet to be determined for this project;

    b. an IFF levy is intended to recover costs of infrastructure from beneficiaries, as opposed to capture value that is created due to a specific infrastructure investment.

42. We consider there is a case to pursue investigation of a specific value capture tool, and recommend that Cabinet approval is sought to undertake this further work.

43. We strongly agree with the advice from the Establishment Unit that any announcements on the project should signal that the Government is progressing investigation of value capture mechanisms, with the intent of using such tools to contribute funding to the project.

Next steps

44. As we have outlined, we consider that there is a case to progress the project, on the basis that it is an integrated transport infrastructure and urban development scheme. If Cabinet chooses to accept the indicative business case and agrees to proceed with the project to the next phase, it will be important that Cabinet is clear on its expectations of what the detailed business case needs to address to achieve the transport and urban outcomes sought. To enable greater success of the ultimate preferred option, before route and mode decisions are taken, we recommend the following activities are undertaken:

    a. further engagement with the communities along the corridor to establish social licence for both the transport and urban objectives

    b. the strategic case is revisited to properly reflect the drivers of the project being both transport and urban issues

    c. the detail of the required urban interventions, including an implementation pathway is developed d further design work to facilitate more robust cost estimates

e options for staging the route development

45. We note that Kāinga Ora is preparing its business case for the Large Scale Projects in Auckland that includes the Mt Roskill and Māngere precincts within the CC2M corridor. Kāinga Ora expects to provide Ministers with draft copies of the business case before the end of the year and final decisions are now expected to go to Cabinet in March 2022 (BRF21/22091097 refers). Alongside the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, we continue to emphasise with Kāinga Ora the importance to present options in the business case that are consistent with the higher-density future land use that the CC2M project would enable, so Cabinet can properly consider the dependencies between the two projects.

46. We recommend that this report is shared with the Minister of Transport, Hon Michael Wood and Minister of Housing, Hon Megan Woods.

47. We understand that the Ministry of Transport is providing a draft Cabinet paper to the Minister of Transport on Friday 22 October 2021 to seek his direction and feedback, with a view to bringing a report back and recommendations to DEV on Wednesday 24 November 2021. When the Cabinet paper is circulated for ministerial consultation, we are able to provide you with feedback on the specific recommendations to support this process.

48. We also understand that the Minister of Transport is intending to bring an oral item to Cabinet on Tuesday 26 October to seek Cabinet approval to release the independent Chair’s report on Friday 29 October.