

Amending the Government Policy Statement Discussion Document 16th March 2009



Submission from TRAFINZ, The New Zealand Traffic Institute Inc 2 April 2009

Introduction

TRAFINZ represents a wide grouping of New Zealand local authorities, covering the majority of the New Zealand population. Its membership includes regional councils, the major metropolitan cities and smaller provincial authorities as well as private sector, Police, government agencies and non local government members.

TRAFINZ' Executive is comprised of elected councillors and practitioners, drawn from a cross section of the membership, together with senior personnel representing its key government partners and is supported by a nation wide Technical Committee of senior technical staff from transport consultancies, local government, Police and educators that volunteer their services *pro bono*. This year TRAFINZ will run its 61st annual conference.

TRAFINZ' primary focus is on sustainable transportation planning, traffic management and road safety. It provides specialist advice to member authorities on traffic and safety issues by drawing from the depth of expertise available through its members and its strong international network of transport experts. It also acts as a conduit for local authorities to respond to the Government on new transport policies and legislation.

Purpose

This paper is to provide some experience responses on the GPS discussion document to help facilitate the development of a local government sector response.

Trafinz is supportive of Local Government NZ. Trafinz understands that Local Government New Zealand must provide its views on the GPS discussion document by 2 April 2009 and that Government has an obligation to incorporate this experience expert input into the GPS Amendment.

TRAFINZ views

Overview of GPS

1. While TRAFINZ understands that transport needs to respond to changing political direction, the long lead times required to develop coherent transport strategies require a high degree of consistency.
2. The discussion document makes no reference to the New Zealand Transport Strategy and hence TRAFINZ is not clear whether this signifies that the strategy has any future. This will become an issue for Regional Transport Committees as they move beyond

their current programming tasks and into their regional strategy functions. The New Zealand Transport Agency will be tasked with assessing the economic efficiency of each activity. However, without targets and measures it is not clear how NZTA will achieve the outcomes required of New Zealand communities whom they do not represent.

3. The new GPS based upon this discussion document is likely to signal changes to regional transport programmes. For some this will be around increased levels of state highway activity and for others it may be around the changes to the rail component of passenger transport programmes. The significance of these changes should be considered on a “case by case” basis.
4. TRAFINZ understands and supports transport’s important focus on contributing to economic vitality. However we stress that this should not be at the expense of other social or environmental objectives. The list of impacts in the amended GPS needs to ensure that environmental and social bottom lines are not adversely impacted. As the GPS states the most pressing challenge for the next year or so. However environmental impacts, most notably Climate Change, will be ongoing and of far greater magnitude. New Zealand’s transport system must take active steps – now - to respond to those challenges. We need as a nation to be much more careful in exercising kaitiakitanga and in ensuring that our ‘clean green’ status is real not image. The importance of environmental stewardship is not particularly apparent in the GPS.
5. The funding ranges for activity classes in the discussion document are very wide (up to 200 m in some cases). The NZTA will be required to determine actual funding allocations through the NLTP. The breadth of the current ranges has implications for transparency of prioritisation processes and delivery accountability. It is a well known fact that funding levels have not been delivered for a number of years and this is reflected in the current high urban local road crash outcomes, reliability of journey times, congestion and poor accessibility for people and freight delivery for the NZ economy.

Safety

6. TRAFINZ strongly supports improvements in road safety being a key specific impact. While the number of people dying on New Zealand roads fell to 366 in 2008 we are still going to comprehensively fail to meet the current 2010 Road Safety target of no more than 300 deaths by 2010. The number of serious injuries has risen during the period of the Safety Strategy, and the number of minor injuries has increased significantly. In 2007 1.2% of the NZ population were killed or injured on NZ roads. (refer The Social Cost of Road Crashes and Injuries June 2008 update) The cost of death, injury and property damage as a result of road crashes in 2007 (latest figures available) was \$4.5 billion. The overall social cost of crashes has been essentially static despite the reduction in fatalities. This cost is greater than the combined cost of all congestion on the economy. It therefore absolutely warrants being a higher focus than in the past.
7. TRAFINZ believes that the current high cost of road trauma can be attributed to a lack of commitment to investing in road safety engineering. This includes both State Highways and local urban roads. Local urban roads are often *routes of national*

significance - delivering people and freight to markets that are not only city to city journeys but are often to airports, industry areas or ports as well as tourist, heritage, coastal and other destinations. Coupled with this is the lack of transport choice created by many years of under investment in public transport and active modes. For example there is a lack of continuous infrastructure to enable users to choose to walk and cycle for the vast majority of transport trips, which are short to medium length trips that could be undertaken by these modes if infrastructure existed.

8. In terms of safety, our submission is that the focus on State Highway improvements should not be dominated too greatly by large capacity improvement projects, but should also take bold steps to better provide for much smaller cost safety works, such as median and edge barriers, and safe passing lanes. These are generally low cost and very effective.
9. A greater level of investment in safety engineering is also critically important given the proposed GPS reduces the level of investment in road policing by almost \$400 – 500 million (compared with the current GPS) over the ten years. New Zealand has relied very heavily on enforcement in reducing the road toll (fatalities) and lessening that enforcement should not come without more investment in engineering (and education for example through better driver training). The GPS should provide better indication of how safety objectives will be achieved.

Sustainability and Urban Form

10. TRAFINZ is concerned at the reduction in funding for public transport and active modes (walking and cycling). While we understand the comment that most New Zealanders drive to work, this does not have to be the case in larger cities (indeed it is not in Wellington now) and there is an important role for the Government to continue to encourage mode shift. We have no difficulty with this being required to be done in an economically efficient fashion.
11. Good urban planning has a huge role to play in reducing the need for and cost of providing for transport. Good urban planning should also have significant positive economic impacts, certainly in terms of New Zealand's long term competitiveness. The relationship with good urban planning should form a key plank of transport planning.

The Role of Pricing/Economic Efficiency

12. We consider that appropriate pricing of all modes and the concept of peak pricing has a vital role to play. Providing peak capacity for commuter and recreational purposes without pricing will be very expensive and economically inefficient. Reliable freight access is a higher priority.
13. TRAFINZ supports the amended GPS' requirement that projects demonstrate value for money and economic efficiency. It is hard to understand why political decisions are made in favour of projects with negative economic returns.
14. TRAFINZ supports a review of discount rates used in assessing projects. We agree that these are currently on the high side, but would caution against going as low as

some advocates have suggested. A realistic level, periodically reviewed as economic conditions changed, needs to be established.

Thank you for the opportunity of making a submission.

We would welcome the opportunity to be further involved as the GPS's further development, and its implementation.

Please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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