

## Election ready or shovel ready?

Auckland Business Chamber CEO Michael Barnett says politicians promise many projects to fix Auckland's transport system when they win elections, but Aucklanders realise these promises are meaningless without action.

**M**r Barnett chairs the Auckland Business Forum, an organisation dedicated to getting Auckland's transport system performing to a high standard. Members include EMA (Northern), the National Road Carriers Association, the NZ Automobile Association, Civil Contractors NZ and Infrastructure NZ.

He says what Auckland needs to see is results, bringing meaningful progress on previous commitments to key projects and transport corridors. "Most importantly, it means delivering outcomes that demonstrate significant progress on the region's transport network to an increasingly frustrated Auckland public. That's faster and safer travel for all modes, better access to employment and education, quality travel choices and fewer emissions."

### Promises unmet

Promises to progress solving Auckland's transport congestion problems remain completely unmet, Mr Barnett asserts. "Ten years ago, freight services could manage three to four deliveries a day around Auckland. Now it's two or three or fewer. In northern suburbs, deliveries are refused

— especially on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula — after 2.30pm despite the 7 km Penlink Project being planned more than 10 years ago to ease congestion. Traffic has steadily increased as more houses are built, yet construction on the road hasn't started."

In south Auckland, the East West Link was consented four years ago. A key freight road serving rail and nearby businesses in the Southdown area, construction has not yet started, despite funds of \$800 million being allocated.



Auckland Business Forum chair and Auckland Business Chamber CEO Michael Barnett

Artist's impression of the proposed East West Link – the Auckland Business Forum says 2021 is shaping up to be an ideal time to get Auckland's critical transport projects underway

"Auckland's traffic congestion cost the economy around \$1.5 billion in 2017, and pre-Covid was projected to increase," Mr Barnett says. "It certainly will when we recover. A scheme to improve traffic flows through congestion charging is sitting in the drawer of officials — now is the time to give it a trial."

The Auckland Business Forum is urging politicians to stop making transport promises, and give more responsibility for developing and implementing solutions to the NZ Infrastructure Commission (Infracom), an independent body chaired by former Reserve Bank governor Dr Alan Bollard. Mr Barnett says this will help strip the politics out of decision-making.

### All that's missing is action

With 2021 shaping as a year for Covid-19 impacts to increase, Mr Barnett says it is an ideal time for getting Auckland's critical transport projects underway. "Projects

such as the Penlink and East West Link roads and mass transport projects to the airport and northwest are critical. Meanwhile, a well-funded campaign to address our failing road maintenance is simple to scale up and will provide much-needed employment opportunities and reduce maintenance costs for our residential and commercial vehicle fleets. All that's missing is action," he states.

"If Auckland is to get an improved transport system, it needs the next Government to make quick progress by ensuring the bureaucrats and the system deliver results. There are billions of unallocated infrastructure funds available, but what is needed post-election is a rapid timeline for delivery — no more time wasted on chopping and changing plans and politicking.

"The Government gets more than 50% of the revenue from petrol. Transport system users are not getting back a suitable return."

## From Boeing to baling — pilots fly to the rescue of heavy agriculture industry

New Zealand pilots waiting for international aviation to restart will be able to use their aviation transport skills to help meet the urgent need for heavy agriculture machinery operators throughout the country.

**T**he New Zealand Air Line Pilots' Association (NZALPA) medical and welfare director, Andy Pender, says the association has been working for several months with the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Rural Contractors' Association, other government departments and training providers to match pilot expertise with the immediate needs

of the agricultural sector.

"By matching skills and the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) licences pilots already hold, we've found almost 200 opportunities for pilots to put their skills to use with land-based machinery and do their bit for New Zealand's essential agriculture economy," Mr Pender says.

Several hundred pilots, either on

furlough or who have been made redundant in the wake of Covid-19, could help meet the urgent skills shortage in the agriculture sector, made more desperate by the inability of experienced offshore seasonal agricultural operators to return for the upcoming harvest.

### Filling the gaps

Rural Contractors' Association chief executive Roger Parton contacted his national membership, alerting them to surveys NZALPA had taken of its members to identify transferable skills that, with some extra training, could result in pilots helping to fill some of the gaps many growers and exporters now face.

"Those pilot surveys indicated a significant number who, in addition to considerable flying expertise and qualifications, also held land transport licences class 2 or

higher, with specific NZTA category endorsements, and also had previous agricultural large machinery operating and farming experience," Mr Parton says.

Andy Pender, a former captain for Virgin Australia (New Zealand), says that the synergies NZALPA found through working across the Government and directly with operators has been extraordinary, and the training opportunities and willingness to work together have been inspiring.

"It also demonstrates the way New Zealanders take a practical approach in time of crisis. As an industry and workforce, we, our families, and crewmates endured an incredible and brutal shock, but we're determined to apply our training to where it is needed, pick up additional skills, and make the most of new opportunities," Mr Pender says.