



Te Rōpū Tohutohu mō te Pokapū o te Tāone

# **City Centre Advisory Panel**

## End of Term Report 2022-2025.

11 September, 2025



## **Purpose**

The purpose of this end-of-term report is to reflect on the contributions of the City Centre Advisory Panel over the 2022–2025 term, highlight key achievements and areas of focus, and provide advice and considerations for the future.

The report summarises the Panel’s priorities, progress made, and the challenges and opportunities that remain. It is intended to inform the Elected Members, Council group, and partners of the Panel’s collective perspective, and to guide future decision-making to ensure the city centre continues to thrive as the economic, cultural, and social heart of Auckland and Aotearoa.

## Members of the panel

### Chairs:

- Independent Chair, Scott Pritchard
- Deputy Chair, Patrick Reynolds      Transport sector

### Panel Members:

- Adam Parkinson      Residents' association (City Centre Residents Group)
- Alec Tang      Sustainability and climate change
- Amy Malcolm      Tertiary education sector (Auckland University of Technology)
- Ann-Marie Searchfield      Social Sector (Lifewise)
- Antony Phillips      Residents' association (City Centre Residents Group)
- Bernie Haldane      Arts, culture and events (Auckland Arts Festival)
- Debbie Summers      Tourism and travel sector (ID Tours)
- Dr Natalie Allen      Urban design sector
- Genevieve Sage      Waitematā Local Board Chair, Auckland Council
- George Crawford      Property sector (Property Council of NZ)
- Grant Kemble      Mana whenua (Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei representative)
- Helen Robinson      Social sector (Auckland City Mission)
- Jamey Holloway      Business associations (Karanga-a-hape Road Business Association)
- Kiri Coughlan      Tertiary education sector (University of Auckland)
- Neville Findlay      Retail sector representative
- Viv Beck      Business associations (Heart of the City)
- Mayor Wayne Brown      Auckland Council
- Councillor Mike Lee      Auckland Council

### Support Staff:

- Lead Officer – Simon Oddie      Priority Location Director – City Centre Lead Agency, Auckland Urban Development Office

- Natalie Hansby – Manager, City Centre Experience, Auckland Urban Development Office
- Senior Governance and Relationship Advisor – Tam White
- Principal Advisor Panels – Victoria Wicks-Brown
- Chief Liaison Councillor – Councillor Julie Fairey.

## Introduction

The City Centre Advisory Panel brings together representatives from across central Tāmaki Makaurau – spanning business, retail, residential, local board, tertiary, design, climate, arts and culture, tourism, social sectors, and tangata whenua interests. Collectively, we provide both lived experience and professional expertise, grounded in deep connections across Auckland and Aotearoa.

As a panel, we are united in our commitment to Auckland’s success. A thriving region depends on a strong and vibrant city centre – the beating heart of our city and the nation’s hub for employment, education, transport, tourism, and cultural identity. At just 4.5 square kilometres, the city centre generates 8% of New Zealand’s GDP and serves as a major destination for workers, residents, and visitors alike. Its success is inseparable from the prosperity and liveability of the wider region.

Because of this, we believe the city centre must remain a strategic priority for the Council group. The City Centre Masterplan (CCMP) provides a clear and enduring vision for its future. The Panel reiterates its strong support for the CCMP’s outcomes and calls on the Council to reflect these more explicitly in the Annual Plan and future investment decisions.

## Panel Work Programme

During this term, the Panel identified six key focus areas to guide our work programme:

1. **Community and Visitor Safety** – Build on progress to ensure people feel safe and supported, with perceptions matching on-the-ground improvements.
2. **Enhancing Vibrancy and Experience** – Support initiatives that attract people (residents, visitors, workers, and students) and create an attractive, high-quality urban environment.
3. **Growing a Thriving Residential Population** – Enable strong residential growth targets, with the infrastructure needed to make city centre living inclusive and desirable.
4. **Positioning as a Premier Learning and Innovation Hub** – Unlock the city centre’s potential as the national centre for education, research, and innovation.
5. **Maximising the Value of Integrated Transport Networks** – Improve access and connectivity, especially as we prepare for the opening of the City Rail Link.
6. **Increasing Climate Resilience** – Advance adaptation and emissions-reduction measures in line with *Te Tāruke-ā-Tāwhiri*.

The Panel has made solid progress across all six areas, with some requiring greater attention in response to emerging challenges and opportunities. The panel believes that collectively these priorities remain the right balance for shaping a thriving city centre. As the city evolves, we recommend that the Council group continues to invest with flexibility – focusing effort where it is most needed while holding fast to this holistic mix of priorities.

### Community and Visitor Safety

Community and visitor safety has been a top priority for the Panel throughout this term. The Panel recognises that for the city centre to thrive, all people must feel safe and supported when they work, live, study, or visit here. The Panel has consistently advocated for greater investment not only in traditional safety and security measures, but also in initiatives that promote wellbeing and inclusion – particularly for those who are most vulnerable.



Key successes this term:

- City Centre Safety Plan – Council taking a stronger role in facilitating a coordinated, integrated response to safety in the central city.
- Increased police presence – the Panel has been a strong advocate for greater visibility and reassurance policing.
- Expansion of the council-led safety wardens programme (formerly City Watch) to enhance the on-street presence with greater coverage across the city centre and proactive bylaws enforcement.
- Expanded homelessness outreach by Auckland City Mission, to improve health and housing outcomes for street whanau, rough sleepers and the housing insecure.
- Expansion of the Street Guardians programme by Auckland City Mission, as a meaningful alternative to street begging.
- Improved integration of CCTV monitoring to support timely responses to incidents.
- Pilot of a late-night safe zone on Friday and Saturday nights for people who need help or support on a night out.

These combined initiatives, supported in a large part through the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR), have contributed to a marked decrease in reported crime across the city centre. This progress is encouraging and has had a positive impact on both perceptions of safety and lived experience.

However, the Panel notes that the use of the CCTR to fund safety initiatives was not the original intent of the targeted rate. While this flexible investment has been critical to recent improvements, we strongly urge Council to establish sustainable, long-term funding mechanisms for safety and wellbeing programmes. The future of these essential services cannot be left dependent on a rate designed for city centre transformation.

The Panel also stresses that this progress must not lead to complacency. Continued focus is required, especially in responding to the sharp increase in homelessness. Between September 2024 and May 2025, Auckland has seen a 90 percent rise in people sleeping rough – many of whom are in the city centre. It is not acceptable that those in greatest need remain without housing or adequate support. Urgent and coordinated action is required to ensure homelessness in the city centre becomes rare, brief, and non-recurring.

## Enhancing Vibrancy and Experience

The Panel recognises the critical role that events, arts, culture, and destination management (including cruise) play in shaping the city centre's identity and success. International experience clearly demonstrates that investing in cultural programming and entertainment gives people more reasons to visit more often. A vibrant city centre draws residents, workers, students, and visitors alike, and the resulting intensity of activity is a competitive advantage unique to urban centres.

For this reason, the Panel has consistently regarded investment in events and destination management as non-negotiable. These activities generate proven economic, cultural, and social benefits, directly supporting Auckland's vibrancy, appeal, and competitiveness. Conversely, reductions in funding are not cost savings - they are economic losses that weaken both the Auckland and national economies.

A sustainable funding mechanism needs to be secured to strengthen Auckland's long-term position. Recognising the proven value of investment in events and destination management, the Panel has taken a proactive stance by:

- **Endorsing additional CCTR allocations** towards attraction and activation activities through the FY25 Annual Plan.
- **Supporting a significant uplift in FY26 and FY27 CCTR investment** to attract people and deliver compelling experiences, strategically timed to coincide with the opening of the City Rail Link and the New Zealand International Convention Centre in 2026.

The additional investment over the Panel's term has enabled:

- Attraction of major events and performances – including Dua Lipa, the Live Nation Winter Series, The Others Way, Six the Musical, The Lord of the Rings musical, and the Auckland Live Cabaret Series.
- Securing conventions and business events – such as Auckland Startup Week.
- Development of strategic initiatives – including the City Centre Investment Prospectus, the Auckland by Night Action Plan, and the Student Experience Partnership Plan.
- Enhanced promotion and destination marketing – from cruise ship welcomes, expanded Christmas in the City Centre celebrations, and Heart of the City's visitor campaigns, through to the It's On in Auckland campaign by Tātaki Auckland Unlimited and Karangahape Road Business Association's 2025 winter campaign.

Looking ahead, the Panel strongly urges Council and central government to fast-track the introduction of sustainable funding solutions – such as a bed-night levy – to secure the long-term future of Auckland’s events and destination management programme. This is essential to safeguard the city centre’s vibrancy, resilience, and role as a driver of regional and national prosperity.

## **Growing a Thriving Residential Population**

A thriving permanent residential population is essential to the health and success of the city centre. Residents bring life and vibrancy beyond standard retail and office hours, helping to create a city centre that is active on evenings and weekends, resilient in the face of economic shifts, and safer through passive surveillance. A strong and diverse residential base also fosters a deeper sense of community and belonging.

Unlocking the full potential of city centre living requires sustained investment in both hard infrastructure (such as housing, transport, and public spaces) and soft infrastructure (such as community facilities, services, and partnerships). Together, these enable the city centre to be seen not only as a place to work and visit, but also as a desirable and inclusive place to call home.

Key successes this term:

The Panel’s focus this term has been on understanding the current dynamics of city centre living and progressing a set of small but significant initiatives to lay the groundwork for future growth. This has included:

- Setting an ambition and vision for a thriving residential population of 100,000 in the city centre.
- Strengthening the evidence base on the value of residential growth, highlighting the economic, social, and environmental benefits of more people living centrally.
- Progressing a proposal for enhancing community partnerships and strengthening the residential voice in city centre decision-making.
- Dedicated CCTR funding to support and enable the next steps of this workstream.
- Providing regular updates on market trends and tools for growth, including property market dynamics, office-to-residential conversions, Plan Change 78, housing levers, and demographic profiles.





- What's coming up:
- A pilot project to test and progress the findings of the community partnerships and residential voice workstream.
- Delivery of the City Centre Residents Survey 2026, providing fresh insights into resident needs and experiences.
- Specific place-based initiatives, including work in the Victoria Quarter.
- A refreshed City Centre Action Plan programme to strengthen support for residential communities, building on the groundwork laid this term.

While this term has been about testing, learning, and advancing smaller initiatives, the Panel sees the next term's focus as shifting to unlocking the full potential of the city centre as a thriving residential community. This will require activating the wider set of levers available. Growing a diverse, resilient residential population is one of the most powerful ways to ensure the long-term success of the city centre and must remain a core priority.

## **Positioning as a Premier Learning and Innovation Hub**

The city centre is uniquely positioned to establish itself as a world-leading hub for learning and innovation, anchored by its two globally recognised universities. These institutions are not only major contributors to the local economy, but also vibrant drivers of talent, creativity, and cultural exchange. The Panel sees continued investment in this area as a major tailwind for the city centre, providing long-term momentum for Auckland's growth and global competitiveness.

Key successes this term:

- Student Experience Partnership Action Plan – advancing an implementation strategy to strengthen Auckland's reputation as a student-friendly city, with a particular focus on cultural and social connection.
- Targeted safety initiatives – improving student safety and wellbeing, especially at night, to ensure the city centre is welcoming and inclusive.
- Learning Quarter precinct planning – progressing a delivery plan that aligns significant university investment in their campuses with complementary public sector investment, improving access and connectivity to these critical city centre assets.

The next term must focus on how we leverage the role of the universities to strengthen the city centre's attractiveness as an innovation hub. This includes fostering deeper connections between education, research, business, and the wider

community, and positioning Auckland's city centre as a destination for talent, ideas, and entrepreneurship on the global stage.

## **Maximise Value of Integrated Transport Networks**

The city centre is the pivotal node of Auckland's transport system. The efficiency of different modes, how well they connect, and how effectively they meet user needs all have a direct impact on the city centre's success. Integrated, co-ordinated networks that align with the land uses they serve – residential, commercial, cultural, and retail – are essential to a smoothly functioning city centre.

The Panel is broadly supportive of the intent behind the City Centre Bus Plan, Access for Everyone, and the City Centre Parking Plan. However, with the city centre not experiencing the same growth rates as the pre-2019 period, there must be confidence that proposed changes are fit for purpose in both the current and future context.

Positive steps forward include:

- Development and implementation of the City Centre Bus Plan.
- Development of short-term initiatives to address pick-up / drop-off, loading, and servicing needs in key parts of the city centre.
- Development of circulation plans to support the future network operating model when the City Rail Link opens and beyond.

The Panel's view is that greater consideration is needed on the timing and pace of change. With the current economic climate, lower foot traffic, and reduced spending, sequencing is critical. We need confidence that initiatives will deliver the intended benefits, and that changes are introduced at the right time and in the right way to support, rather than constrain, the city centre's recovery and long-term growth.

## **Increasing Climate Resilience**

The city centre has a unique opportunity to lead the way in sustainable living, development, and transport. It plays a critical role in protecting and regenerating the natural environment and enhancing its mauri. A sustainable city centre with a healthy natural environment not only improves the quality of life for residents, workers, and visitors, but also strengthens Auckland's appeal to investors, businesses, and future residents.

The Panel acknowledges that climate resilience has not received the level of focus originally intended this term, particularly in light of the lessons from the Auckland Anniversary floods. However, the Panel sees strong benefit in the city centre establishing itself as a sustainable leader, with climate-resilient infrastructure at its core.

It has been encouraging to see progress on the Blue-Green Network implementation plan for the city centre. The plan's emphasis on stormwater management, urban ngahere expansion, biodiversity, and ecological health demonstrates the potential for the city centre to set itself apart from other urban centres. Embedding these approaches, as we have seen in projects such as Myers Park, Te Ha Noa and Daldy Street, will help position the city centre as both a place of resilience and regeneration, and a model for sustainable urban living across Aotearoa.

## **Review of the City Centre Targeted Rate**

As part of its focus this term, the Panel requested staff to review the city centre targeted rate (CCTR) programme and develop a proposal for extending the rate. The review was prompted by the need to respond to both immediate challenges and emerging opportunities for the city centre, while ensuring long-term alignment with the place outcomes of the City Centre Masterplan.

The CCTR is currently confirmed until 2031. At its meeting on 18 August, the City Centre Advisory Panel endorsed a proposed six-year extension of the CCTR, from 2031 through to 2037, along with revised investment priorities for the portfolio programme.

A key feature of the refreshed programme is a significant shift towards initiatives that attract more people into the city centre. The intent is to stimulate economic activity by enhancing the city centre experience, encouraging visitation, and supporting the recovery of street-front businesses such as retail, hospitality, and entertainment.

The Panel emphasised the importance of resetting Aucklanders' relationship with the city centre and capitalising on upcoming milestones, including:

- Completion of major midtown public realm projects.
- The opening of the City Rail Link.
- The opening of the New Zealand International Convention Centre.

The Panel also acknowledged the significant disruption caused by construction, particularly from the City Rail Link, and stressed the need for investment that restores confidence and brings people back into the city centre.

To enable immediate progress, a focused programme of visitor-attraction initiatives will begin in FY2025/2026, funded through existing CCTR reserves.

The Panel notes that the decision on whether to extend the CCTR ultimately rests with the Governing Body, and that subject to Governing Body support, public feedback would be sought through either an Annual Plan or Long-term Plan consultation.

## Considerations for the New Term

- As the Panel concludes this term, a number of key themes have emerged that should guide the establishment and focus of the Panel in the next term. These reflect both lessons learned and opportunities to strengthen the Panel's impact going forward:
- **Diverse representation and voices** – Members emphasised the importance of drawing on a wide range of perspectives, including students and young people, Māori and Pasifika communities, and other under-represented groups. Diversity of views enriches the Panel's discussions and strengthens the legitimacy of its advice. At the same time, it is critical that the voices of those directly contributing to the targeted rate - including small businesses and ratepayers - are clearly heard. Striking the right balance between community diversity and ratepayer representation, while keeping the Panel at a manageable size, will be key to its effectiveness in the next term.
- **Stronger induction and support** – A more thorough induction process for new members is needed, covering the Panel's purpose, powers, and ways of working. A well-structured induction will help members get up to speed more quickly, ensuring they can contribute effectively and confidently from the outset.
- **Maintaining momentum** – Building on progress made this term is critical. The Panel needs to carry momentum on its key priorities through to next term, while also remaining agile and responsive to changing contexts and emerging challenges.
- **Focus on key themes** – The Panel identified several areas requiring continued and greater attention: transport networks, visitor attraction, investment attraction, and safety and wellbeing. Within safety and wellbeing, members emphasised the importance of not only improving security but also addressing wider social outcomes, working jointly with central government to respond to underlying issues. As part of investment attraction, opportunities in retail and technology were identified as particularly important to strengthen the city centre's competitiveness and long-term appeal.
- **Clear investment framework and economic development strategy** – The Panel stressed the need for a robust investment framework that demonstrates the full value of city centre initiatives. This should capture economic returns and benefits more holistically, grounded across all four wellbeings rather than financial outcomes alone. Alongside this, the Panel sees a clear need for a



cohesive economic development strategy for the city centre, firmly nested within the wider regional and national context. Together, these tools would strengthen the case for investment, ensure resources are directed to where they achieve the greatest impact, and position the city centre as a driver of Auckland's and New Zealand's economic success.

- **Strategic regeneration focus** – The Panel expressed interest in placing greater emphasis on big, strategic place-based regeneration programmes in the next term. Priority opportunities include the central wharves (and cruise infrastructure), Downtown West, Te Ara Tukutuku, the Aotea Arts Quarter, and Te Toangaroa. These transformational projects can redefine the city centre's role and attractiveness for residents, businesses, students and visitors alike.
- **Collaboration and perspectives** – The Panel values the ability to listen and learn from one another, recognising that diverse perspectives are an important strength.

## Summary and Closing

- This has been a term of both challenge and achievement for the City Centre Advisory Panel. The Panel has continued to provide strong, sector and experience-based advice and to advocate for the interests of the city centre and its communities. The endorsement of the CCTR extension, the progress on safety, vibrancy, residential growth, innovation, transport, and climate resilience, and the agility shown in response to shifting contexts all stand as significant achievements.
- Looking forward, the focus must now shift to how Auckland unlocks the full potential of its city centre – as a thriving residential community, a premier hub for learning and innovation, and a compelling destination for workers, international and local visitors, and investors. This will require sustainable funding, stronger partnerships, and continued investment into experiences that bring people back.
- The Panel reiterates its strong support for the City Centre Masterplan as the guiding vision. To succeed, Auckland must ensure the city centre remains a strategic priority - supported by the right tools, the right investment, and the right voices at the table.
- As a final word, the Panel urges Council and central government to progress sustainable funding mechanisms, such as a bed-night levy, to secure the future vibrancy, resilience, and competitiveness of the city centre.
- Yours sincerely

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- Scott Pritchard

Independent Chair CITY CENTRE ADVISORY PANEL