

**Transcript of Michael Barnett's speech**  
**Metro Project Action Plan launch**  
**Friday 6 October 2006**

Today I am not Michael Barnett CEO or Chairman. I am Michael Barnett; passionate Aucklander, father, husband, employer, ratepayer, and hopeful citizen.

Too often the measure of a great city-region is made in rankings, and ratios alone. We focus on the physical form of asphalt, metal and broadband and forget about the people whose energy spills out into the region and transforms Auckland with new ideas, skills, experiences and culture.

The Auckland city-region represents human endeavours and achievements.

Whilst the Metro Action Plan is a blueprint for beginning economic transformation, I want to encourage you to focus first on what could be the human outcomes of our agreement to transform Auckland economically, into a world-class city-region.

Ultimately our measures of success will be in:

- The proud smiles of young graduates going into their dream jobs, skill-ready to make a valuable contribution to new sectors of an innovative economy.
- The pleasure of fast, unimpeded daily journeys across a well-designed metropolis.
- New Zealanders' strongly held pride in Auckland and sincere belief that it is the best place to work, live and play.
- The relief of a fast, easy live Internet video feed from a Bethell's Beach film-set, to Brussels.
- The exhilaration of a visitor standing atop a world heritage volcanic site and ready to participate in a cultural event.
- Wild and sustained applause from a stadium of 60,000+ at the opening ceremony of the Auckland Commonwealth Games.

As I introduce an ambitious but achievable agenda for change here today, let's put our focus *forward* onto the people and the future and what the outcomes of our actions may be.

Since work started on the Metro Project in December 2005, a consultative approach with the region has led to a single platform of actions to transform Auckland's economy.

On our journey we've sought the input of an international team of experts and Auckland leaders. A champions group representing Auckland business, government and community leaders then emerged from the Symposium for Auckland, held in May 2006, to create the actions that will deliver on the challenges and opportunities defined by the working groups here in Auckland and from the international team's report.

This action plan sits within a long-term continuum that will go on evolving for decades to come. Today marks an exciting milestone because it is the first time such an action plan has been created to deliver a mixture of:

- Bold new initiatives.
- Scaled up existing local initiatives.
- Better alignment of all initiatives.

The continuum [on this slide] recognises that having a plan is not enough on its own. Auckland and New Zealand's long-term economic success depends on taking concerted action now and then embedding the actions in a sustainable, continually evolving framework.

The message we have received from the thousands of passionate Aucklanders who have contributed their thinking, energies and aspirations to this Metro project is that our region is ready for positive change.

Like a weary parent who can sense their child's impending transformation from gangly adolescent, to self-assured adult, Aucklanders can *sense* a similar coming of age in our city-region.

The political, business, educational, cultural and community leaders, who provided the foundation for this Metro Action Plan, have all *sensed* a similar resurgence in Auckland. The appetite for change is evident and there is increasing momentum for action. I believe as most of you do, that the time is ripe to boost Auckland's performance.

For these reasons and many more, this is a nation-building project. The Government's economic transformation agenda recognises our strengths. There is a general acknowledgement that Auckland has this country's greatest potential for becoming a world-class city-region and competing effectively in a global market.

The good news is that the thinking that is required to fuel Auckland's journey to world-class has been done. It is the foundation of this action plan. And the key word is *action*.

Successful transformation requires united leadership, world-class infrastructure and world-class urban centres, a powerful regional identity, a skilled and responsive labour-force and increased innovation and export strength.

The Metro Project Action Plan integrates existing and new regional initiatives into a single, transformational economic delivery plan that answers these five key objectives.

Each objective is supported by strategies. Specific action items, deliverables, timeframes and organisations that will provide action underpin each strategy.

In launching the Action Plan today let me briefly touch on some of the actions included in the plan and ask you to take the document we have provided and read in your own time.

**Objective One** is about taking effective and efficient action to transform the region's economy.

The Metro Project reflects recognition that strengthened regional governance and improved co-operation are keys for success. Leadership was not on our agenda originally but came as a recommendation from our international team. Auckland needs integrated leadership and improved efficiencies. The Champions for Auckland group initiated some discussions on the issue and progress continues to be made. A comment I would make is that we have to worry about function first and form will follow later.

A quick look at the number of entities duplicating efforts and resources to achieve the same ends in the region shows a huge scope for improved efficiency and savings. For example, do we really think it is necessary to have 7 building control authorities, 8 consenting agencies, 12 water network operators, 9 teams of people dealing with transport policy? And so the list goes on.

Imagine the savings and efficiencies throughout the region that we could make by removing this duplication and taking action on a region wide basis. Remember form follows function – not the other way around.

I am certain that if we first thought about the functions that are performed regionally - and agreed then on what form is needed to deliver these - we would find common ground to move forward on.

Let me now look to the projects that the Metro Project team has initiated. There has been a call from the region for a single plan and integrated actions. For example with...

- Regional Economic Development Strategy
- Regional Growth Strategy
- Regional Land Transport Strategy.

We have undertaken to provide a single plan for the region with integrated actions that will sit within the long-term sustainability framework. The ARC has already begun work and will deliver this within 18 months.

Transforming the economy will demand a well-resourced regional economic implementation agency that will facilitate the Metro Project's delivery in terms of the initiatives we announce today and others to come.

Auckland Plus and the Auckland Regional Economic Development Forum have done well but, if this plan is to be delivered, it will need capability and capacity to do so.

I appreciate this will test the resolve of both central and local government but I am confident that, with the collaboration of both public and private sectors and the continued support of our Champions for Auckland, we can deliver on this plan and begin transforming Auckland in to a world-class city-region.

We have determined the actions that we need to take. Now we need an implementation agency of size and ability.

There is a request from across the region for all Councils to become enablers so as to bring forward the delivery of initiatives that will contribute to Auckland becoming a World Class City Region

Under **Objective Two** (develop world class infrastructure and urban centres) there are some important infrastructure projects underway thanks to local, regional and central government investment in transportation. I have already touched on the need to develop a single infrastructure plan that will deliver impressive results. But with the right investment, Aucklanders will be more productive, earn more and attract more visitors, capital and events.

Two further Metro initiatives are about a stable energy platform and fast global connectivity.

A project to develop an energy prospectus is being led by Doug Heffernan, CEO of Mighty River Power, working with local and central government.

We know Auckland's needs and issues now, but a key aspect of this project is about:

- understanding future needs
- determining better demand management practices
- understanding choices
- values.

A second project is about delivering high-speed regional broadband, providing better access and increasing uptake. This will involve integrating current Waitakere, Manukau, Auckland City, North Shore initiatives, and accelerating development and uptake of plans by Telecom, Vector and others. Our target is December 2008 for the region to have access to high-speed affordable broadband

Responsibility for implementing these actions is with Ross Peat, member of the Economic Development Forum and former Managing Director Microsoft NZ. He will work with local and central government and providers

The Action Plan also addresses the need to have strong and distinctive urban centres, and plans are already underway for revitalising the waterfront and CBD.

There is discussion within the Champions about the potential of a 'special purpose vehicle' to accelerate the implementation of these projects.

A priority is to fast track town centre development to accommodate growth nodes and transport corridors. For example, we have an exciting project focussed on the Eden Park and Kingsland precinct.

Driving this project is Gavin Cormack, Executive Chairman of Beca Group.

**Objective Three** (Transform Auckland into a world-class destination) is about bringing the world to our region.

It's about having a portfolio of events happening year on year and not once every five years.

We intend to establish a well-funded, well-resourced regional agency that will be responsible for delivering events and visitors. There will be expectations and measures but this initiative will have a major impact on the region's efforts to attract higher-spending longer-staying visitors and significant events.

As you would expect, such an agency will require significant funding but this will not come from the ratepayer's pocket. We have initiated discussions with central government on a

bed tax, which would have a cost to the visitors who visit the region and enjoy the amenities we have and the events we will host.

Leading this project is David McConnell, Managing Director of McConnell Limited supported by Rodney Walshe, Chairman of Tourism Auckland.

One message we received from around the region was the need to develop a consistent and compelling regional brand identity that can be used for tourism bodies, local and regional councils, economic development agencies, business and education institutes.

The term 'City of Sails' no longer reflects the region or its people – who we are, what we stand for – the uniqueness of our people – the Pacificness' of who we are. Taking responsibility for delivering this project is I - Michael Barnett.

Rugby World Cup 2011 will be as big an opportunity as Auckland chooses to make it. It provides opportunities to:

- showcase Auckland and leave lasting impressions that attract visitors and events for years to come
- bring forward the delivery dates on improved roading, efficient public transport and event destinations
- show a region that can focus on a world class event and, importantly, can agree, cooperate - and deliver.

A regional steering group has been established and endorsed by the Mayoral Forum and, like the rest of New Zealand, is now awaiting certainty around our premier venue.

One project that is underway and that has been too long off the agenda is a link from Auckland city to the airport. This is the beginning of bringing the world to our region and taking the region's products and services to the world. Leading this initiative is Don Huse, CEO of Auckland International Airport Limited.

Achieving this action requires local and central government support.

**Objective Four** (Develop a skilled and responsive labour force) aims to redress the issue that Auckland city-region is not doing things well, or is doing things on too small a scale.

There are almost 100 programmes across the region operating in the name of tackling skill issues. Programme quality is variable and there is very little communication from agency to agency or between deliverers.

The consensus is that this environment does not provide the best result. It is also agreed that a whole of government approach would be better alongside employer and employee representatives.

Achieving this objective will involve establishing a business-led innovation leadership group to deliver an integrated and region-wide approach to skill.

The Metro Project Action Plan identifies the need to establish a one-stop shop for education training and recruitment information, including regional skills needs information system. The Employers and Manufacturers Association and the Auckland Chamber of Commerce have offered to assist on this initiative

Our working groups are also recommending increasing the capacity for career advisors and teachers, establishing clearer links between training and industry, and improving efforts to encourage parents and families to support lifelong learning.

It is also necessary to promote education and skilled employment within 'diverse communities'. There are some great 'local' initiatives that need to be brought to scale and turned into regional initiatives, and it is also important to recognise that the diversity of our region's workforce is an asset.

Workplace productivity must be improved and many of the initiatives referred to today will deliver this. Importantly, partnerships with Department of Labour and business can be built on.

Driving this group of initiatives is: Peter Menzies, who is on the Growth and Innovation Advisory Board and the Council of the University of Auckland.

**Objective Five** (increase Auckland's innovation and export strength) has similar issues to the previous objective in that we have many agencies operating in the name of innovation but they are not operating in a connected way. Some of the steps that will enable Auckland to take a leadership role in building New Zealand's export success include taking an integrated approach and speaking with one voice. This will require establishing a business-led innovation group within the regional economic development agency, and develop a pilot study for case managing high-growth potential technology businesses.

Steps will be put in place to improve access to pre-seed funding and information sharing between angel investor programmes and investor networks, and another action item involves telling Auckland's innovation story, because there is a good story to be told.

Importantly, the action plan addresses the need to strengthen links between Auckland's businesses, universities and Crown Research Institutes, and to gain more value from our offshore networks by leveraging them to fast-track export success.

Prime Minister, Ministers, distinguished guests: This is the Metro Project Action Plan. We have all done well to get it to this point – but this is just the start of delivering change. What will make a difference now is what we all choose to do next.

Thank you.