

-- Embargoed to 5am, Saturday 9 July --

City transformation a marathon, not a sprint

Barbara McKerrow, Chief Executive, Wellington City Council

Picture a future Wellington, where a group of friends step out of their apartment in a new high-rise building near Courtenay Place. They love living in the city's centre, which has undergone a remarkable transformation compared with 2022. It isn't only the choice of interesting jobs that keeps them here. They are proud, not only of Wellington's revitalised creative city vibe, but its reputation as an inclusive, diverse capital city that is easy to get around. Wellington is a leader in reducing its carbon footprint, and in partnering with Māori. It is a fun and affordable place to live, and the days of pipes bursting in the streets are forgotten.

And talking of pipes – this need not be a pipe dream.

Once every three years council chief executives are required to produce a pre-election report with the aim "to provide information to promote public discussion about the issues facing the local authority". I have just published mine. Whether or not it is read, I am appealing to our citizens to enrol and vote in the upcoming local government election. The future of our city depends on a healthy and inclusive democracy. This year voting opens on 16 September and closes at midday on 8 October.

I began my role as chief executive of Wellington City Council in 2020, just three weeks before the first COVID-19 nationwide lockdown. It has been an intense time for us all since then. Apart from the effects of a global pandemic, Wellington has had to confront its fair share of challenges. But there are also great opportunities for a city known for its creativity and energy. We need to work together to fully realise them.

Over the past three years our elected members have mandated ambitious plans to ensure that Wellington is a capital city fit for the future. Thirty years of traditional infrastructure investment is now concentrated into one decade, including more than \$2 billion to improve Wellington's aging three waters infrastructure. A significant programme of upgrade and development is underway, from transport networks to cultural and community facilities, central city places and spaces, and waste minimisation initiatives. Updated plans are in place to activate the city and enhance Wellington's place as the creative capital – economically, socially, and culturally. Our proposed District Plan will enable a greater level of urban intensification and investment to increase housing supply and accommodate growth. The Let's Get Wellington Moving partnership programme is advancing to the next stage of work on the greatest transformation the city may ever see, for mass rapid transit, urban development, and travel behaviour change.

Transforming cities is a marathon, not a sprint. In the decades I've spent in local government, and coincidentally also during my time as a competitive marathon runner, I've learned you need plenty of determination and perseverance to get to the finish line. In today's environment of COVID, cost inflation, construction and engineering shortages, it's taking even more time and effort. It can be frustrating for those who want to see faster change now. But with deliberate planning and collaboration, Wellington will remain a vibrant, progressive and liveable city.

For the incoming council, the focus will be on shifting Wellington further into this period of transition. There will always be debate about the way forward. But what is not debatable are the challenges of infrastructure and planning for growth, resilience and adaptability; our economy; and funding and financing the solutions. Nor is the reality that the local government sector itself is facing reform. It will take time, and there are certainly big challenges ahead – but there are also major opportunities which can be realised by working better together for Wellington.

- A link to the pre-election report can be found at wcc.govt.nz/elections

ENDS

603 words