Engagement form

Feedback on the draft Transport Research Strategy 2016-2020

Organisation	**NZ Centre for Sustainable Cities, University of Otago, Wellington**

Names	**Ed Randal, Marie Russell, Nick Preval, Lisa Early, Michael Keall, Ralph Chapman, Philippa Howden-Chapman**	**Job titles**	**Research Fellows, Centre Development Manager, Senior Researcher, Centre Co-director, Centre Director**
Contact email	**Edward.randal@otago.ac.nz**	**Phone**	**04 918 6191**

Question 1: Do you support the four enablers discussed in this draft Strategy?

This refers to (i) invest in the right research; (ii) facilitate collaboration; (iii) ensure visibility and (iv) access and invest in research capacity.

These seem like potentially good enablers. They are very broad, but seem to be reasonable high-level aims. Issues may arise in the interpretation and application of these at a later date, but this is unclear without further information.

Having said that, the goals and high-level aims that follow on from these enablers do seem to be rather stuck within the narrow view of the current government. For example, the aim focuses on economic and social benefits of the transport system, and environmental impacts appear to be significantly downplayed. This is part of a wider problem that long-term research (including that covered by this strategy) needs to look beyond the current government's limited objectives (mainly around economic growth) and ask about what society is seeking over the long term, particularly around wellbeing and other post-modern values, and get the right research undertaken in the next two decades, not just the next few years.

We also feel that there is an issue with the strategy as a whole, in that it seems to lack a vision of how the transport sector needs to be able to respond to the large scale drivers of change in the economic, social and environmental systems we operate in; for example, how would the critical need to mitigate climate change be reflected in the research strategy? This requires a richer view of transport as a complex system interacting with (i.e. not just responding to or providing for) other parts of society like cities, land use, building design, and social drivers such as changing sociodemographic and behaviour patterns. These key areas of research are not ruled out by the strategy but are not encouraged, either. To get this sort of wider research done, a strategy needs to encourage dialogue with researchers outside the transport sector as such. Hopefully the knowledge hubs and ideas on improving sector capabilities will help with this, but to ensure this area of research is supported it is important to explicitly include it at this stage in the research strategy.

Question 2: Do you have any comments or suggestion to refine the Triple-4 prioritisation framework?

Please refer to Figure 4 and the worked examples in the Addendum.

It is still not clear how the final prioritisation and funding decisions will be made using this framework. For example, how would the three examples in the Addendum be prioritised as a result of this exercise? A pure count of the 'H', 'M' and 'L' for each project does not give enough information to give a conclusive answer, and it seems like there will still need to be someone making an executive decision on priority and funding. A few 'H' scores in some key areas should be able to put a project forward regardless of the scores in other criteria, but how this will be decided is unclear and highly subjective, and raises the question about what the true value of this framework is. A clearer indication of how this framework will be used and how much

emphasis will be put on the results of it may address these issues.

Additionally, many of the criteria seem to be very subjective. It seems highly likely that some projects would get very different ratings from a range of different people, depending on their views, knowledge, prejudices and agenda. This is likely to be further exacerbated when applying the framework to broader projects or research themes, such as the 18 examples given in this strategy. It may be that this type of framework is too prescriptive an approach to deciding future research priorities, and following this process may simply mask the subjectivity and variability involved (especially if generic weights are applied).

Deciding on the weights to be applied to the various principles would need to be done on a case-by-case basis, as this process is so subjective and many important contextual issues may vary hugely from one project to another. This suggests that prescriptive weights should not be applied. Instead each project should be reviewed and assessed on its own merits and a clearly explained/reasoned decision should be made if one principle is to be favoured over another.

Clearer definitions of the criteria to be applied, especially those for identifying the nature of the research gap, should be developed to help reduce the subjectivity and clarify the process. Comments regarding other specific parts of the framework have been made in other sections of this submission.

Question 3: Do you agree with the initial list of 18 research priorities we have identified?

Please refer to Figure 6 (on page 16).

We do not agree with this initial list of research priorities. These themes may or may not be the most appropriate current research priorities, but as they were developed with such a limited group of stakeholders it is not possible to say whether this process has captured the most important transport research priorities for the country. The stakeholder group used for this task should have been much more representative of the NZ transport system, including a broader range of transport researchers (such as academics outside of Auckland and consultants other than Opus), industry representatives from all transport sectors (the list of stakeholders does not include any representative of the rail industry), and groups that represent the end-users of all transport networks (not just the NZ Automobile Association).

Additionally, the themes presented are very broad and open to significant interpretation so applying the framework in a consistent way will be difficult. Each research priority could consist of many research projects, all with very different ratings for each of the framework criteria. Deciding on a high, medium or low rating for each research theme as a whole is likely to be rather arbitrary.

With regard to specific topics, we believe that there could and should be explicit mention of climate change related emissions in the Safety and Responsibility section. We feel that there should be a theme covering the potential impact of energy price volatility /peak oil on resilience. We are also unclear where research on important areas such as co-benefits of transport, especially health co-benefits, would fit in the proposed themes

Question 4: How do we make the Transport Knowledge Hubs work to collaborate effectively and efficiently with the wider research community?

Please refer to pages 18 to 21.

We feel that the creation of transport knowledge hubs with the aim of increasing collaboration and reaching the wider research community is a good idea. However, it is important to include end-users as well as a broader range of researchers, not just those that are identified as 'transport researchers'. There is a lot of important and relevant work being done in other sectors that the transport research

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community should be exposed to (such as that carried out by public health and social science researchers).

Additionally, the term 'hub' is rather ambiguous in this context. The strategy could be improved by giving more detail about what a hub would look like, who might host/operate it and how individuals and organisations would interface with it.

As part of the knowledge hub development it may be beneficial to set up a transport research clearing-house that is responsible for collating and distributing research from the transport sector, other relevant disciplines, the international literature and citizen-initiated projects in a systematic way.

A dedicated stakeholder engagement knowledge hub to discuss the most effective and efficient ways of consulting and engaging with the wide range of transport stakeholders, including the general public, should also be established.

Question 5:   Do you have any comments on the three ideas around improving the sector capability?

This refers to (i) building a programme to connect researchers to end users; (ii) looking for opportunities to support connection with the international research communities and (ii) identifying areas where there is value in establishing a Research Centre or a Research Chair at a University.

We think the ideas presented for improving the sector capability are a very good start. However, we would strongly encourage the inclusion of funding for training in transport research, especially the establishment of Masters and PhD scholarships in this area. This would be a very good way to ensure the future capacity and capability of the transport research sector in New Zealand is high, and to establish loyalty with high calibre young researchers to encourage them to stay in NZ.

Question 6:   Do you agree with the suggested way of assessing success?

For the suggested assessment of success, please refer to Figures 6, 8, 10 and 11.

The ways of assessing success that are set out in the referred figures are very vague, so it is hard to determine whether success can actually be assessed with these statements. The outcomes to be measured with (yet to be determined) metrics are very qualitative and subjective. It may be very difficult to come up with quantifiable metrics to measure these outcomes and we would need to know what these metrics are to know if they can measure the intended outcomes and can be used to assess success.

Comments on the draft Strategy close on Friday, 12 February 2016.

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