greater WELLINGTON
REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Committee   Wellington Regional Strategy Committee
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WRS Office Update

1.   Purpose of report

To inform the WRS Committee of activities of the office and council-led projects.

2.   Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3)(b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3.   WRS Office Update

3.1   Work Programme

Since 10 December 2008 the WRS Office has had its major focus on progressing the Genuine Progress Index project, open spaces, urban design, WRS resourcing of council-led projects and updating the WRS website.

The Office is involved in the preparations for the Wellington Regional Economic Summit to be held on 8 April.

Presentations to conferences and seminars will continue throughout the year. The first for 2009 involved discussing the Genuine Progress Index as a tool for regional urban development at the NZ Centre for Sustainability Cities Summer School.

3.2   Genuine Progress Index

A separate report on the Genuine Progress Index project is on the agenda.

3.3   Broadband

On 13 November the previous government's Broadband Investment Fund was put on hold and was subsequently discontinued.

The current government has signalled that it wishes to allocate approximately $1.5billion for fast, affordable, open access, broadband – with an objective of fibre reaching 75% of New Zealand homes. The Government has said that commitment is unwavering in the face of economic uncertainty. As with the local government position, there is a strong emphasis on the medium-term future, wider applications and what is needed to increase productivity and innovation.

The Government has not yet announced its plans for the fibre fund, but has indicated that a proposal will be released around the end of March. The next stage for the councils' political processes would be to agree to a council role in response to this, and there may be an intermediate step of agreeing a submission on a draft proposal.

The hiatus in awaiting concrete plans from the Government has allowed the team working on this project to increase work in the areas of deployment technologies and policies that impact this area. It has also meant further development of uptake strategies.

Key workstreams and current status

The four workstreams of the Broadband Project are:
- Governance (Paul Swain)
- Funding (Paul Desborough)
- Deployment Technologies (Deb Gilbertson)
- Demand / Uptake (Suse Reynolds)

The first two of these have been put on hold pending further information on the fibre fund.

Deployment Technologies – A regional workshop was held on 1 December 2008 to look at deployment techniques and low-cost options. This was followed up by specific topic meetings on the following day. Industry and council representatives attended indicating considerable interest in this topic.

Key streams of work that have flowed from this are developing a shallow trenching trial, agreeing a regional position on road opening and RMA rules, and better ways of managing geospatial information.

A shallow trenching trial is being investigated. It could generate information on the likely costs and impacts of specific options, and would include a formal review of these aspects by an independent party. Councils will be particularly interested in the long-term impacts on the road structure of different options compared with the more conventional deep-trenching techniques.

In the area of road opening and RMA rules, all utility operators have access to the road corridor for installing infrastructure as of right, but this activity is controlled by council road opening rules. These take account of the technical requirements including trench position and depth, hours of work, traffic

control and reinstatement. The project will look at how these relate to alternative technologies like shallow and micro-trenching, and whether there can be more consistency in these rules across councils.

All councils operate GIS systems to record and manage information on the management of road assets and the location of utilities in corridors. There are some new software applications available to achieve this more effectively, and facilitate factors like the ability for utility operators to see when a road is due for resealing and planning to time their work accordingly.

Demand / Uptake – A critical part of the Broadband Project is addressing the demand aspects for uptake of new services, as well as the supply of fibre-optic connections. It is clear from several international examples that promotion of the services that are possible is needed if the full potential of fast broadband is to be realised.

In the economic development area, Grow Wellington is developing a programme to ensure that key businesses in the region are aware of and are using high speed connectivity. This extends to small and medium enterprises that operate from people's homes, which is an outcome envisaged in the Government's fibre-to-the-home plans.

Across the MUSH entities (municipalities, universities, schools and hospitals) the three major categories of users are councils, health service providers and educational institutions.

Councils are major users of information and communication technologies and purchasers of telecommunication services. They could leverage their purchasing power to support new fibre investments, and there is significant potential to use high-speed connectivity to improve services to residents (e.g. in libraries and community centres) and enhance efficiency (e.g. having more geospatial and asset management data available in the field, or enabling shared services across councils).

The health sector is looking for major efficiency gains and options like management of information, remote diagnosis and in-home health monitoring could be contributors. We are in discussion with primary health organisations and the district health boards on how they could utilise faster broadband connections.

In the education area, there are projects underway for greater use of computers by students (Computer Clubhouse) and trialling high-speed connectivity in secondary schools. This is possible now for some centrally located schools and the intention is to expand this activity as an urban fibre network grows.

Trans-Tasman cable - A further project related to broadband was advocacy for any new Trans-Tasman fibre-optic cable to land in Wellington. Kordia is a likely supplier as their partner Pipe Networks is laying a new Guam-Sydney link with this as an extension that will plug in offshore from Sydney.

We have had several discussions with Kordia and they understand the argument for a landing point south of Auckland to enhance national resilience. However their engineering investigations have shown the additional cost of a southern North Island landing would be significant because the cable would need to cross a major undersea trench. So a northern North Island landing outside Auckland would achieve resilience while avoiding that cost. Therefore the likelihood of swinging this decision in favour of Wellington now seems low. Kordia has confirmed that this project is still viable in the current economic climate.

3.4   Urban Design

An outcome of the SORT workshop held in August 2008 was to prepare a high level Regional Urban Design Action Plan.

A draft has been prepared including a stocktake of urban design initiatives across the region as well as the urban design-related actions, milestones and responsibilities for action for 2009. This plan is being refined by the urban design working group and will be presented to the committee at their May 2009 meeting.

3.5   Regional Open Space project

A separate report is on the agenda.

4.   WRS Website

The WRS website has been updated to incorporate a separate page on the Wellington Regional Labour Market Strategy initiatives and links. Extra pages have also been added to the projects page of the website to act as an information portal for all WRS projects.

Website address: www.wrs.govt.nz

5.   WRS Project Resourcing

A process for sharing knowledge and experience has been established for each of the WRS projects identified below. The process established includes project leaders developing a stocktake of current work in the project area, providing examples of best practice around the region and clarifying links to WRS principles and Regional Policy Statement policies. It is hoped the first reports from these projects will be completed by 30 June 2009. However, these projects will be on-going and there will be annual updates and information-sharing opportunities in subsequent years.

The WRS website will be utilised as an information portal to hold this information. The projects include:

- Centres/Big box retail (Wellington City Council led)

- Affordable housing (Wellington City Council led)

- Intensification (Wellington City Council led)

- Sub-division code of practice (Kapiti Coast District Council led)

6. Communication

Projects and other activities will continue to be communicated as the opportunity arises.

7. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. **Receives** *the report.*

2. **Notes** *the content of the report.*

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