

Statement to Kāpiti Coast District Council regarding the 2021-24 Long Term Plan, 4 December, 2020



Prepared by David Yockney, Dawn Brook, Jake Roos and Jean Fleming

Low Carbon Kāpiti would like to take the opportunity offered by the “What Matters Most” initiative to inform Council of our concerns for the future of the Kāpiti Coast and where the Council should be focussing its activities over the next 20 years in order to address those concerns. The questions posed were:

1. What matters most as we plan for our district's future?
2. What matters most in your Neighbourhood?
3. What matters most in your community as we navigate through this global pandemic (COVID-19)?
4. What matters most as we experience growth across the district?

On behalf of our 200 members, we offer this letter as a response to the 1st, 3rd, and 4th questions.

The next 20 years, those covered by 2021-2041 Long Term Plan, are critical for the future of human civilisation. As is well known, and probably needs no further explanation, humanity is facing a climate crisis. It is essential that this crisis be confronted, with a major effort being made to find solutions. It is imperative that everyone takes action, at all levels, be it individual, local, regional, national or international. There are no exceptions, everyone and every organisation needs to be involved if this challenge is to be met with any measure of success. Clearly KCDC must be part of the solution. The Long Term Plan 2021-2041 needs to outline, prioritise and provide budget for the necessary concrete steps that will ensure a transition to a low carbon society.

The Council already has a goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2025 for its own activities. This is excellent. This goal must not be lost sight of and must be at the forefront of Council planning. But there is a wider need. The Council should also be facilitating a more ambitious goal of the Kāpiti Coast in its entirety becoming carbon neutral by 2050 at the latest. This would involve taking all steps possible to support all residents, businesses and other organisations to reduce their carbon footprint to net zero. This reflects the global need for a reduction of carbon emissions to zero by mid-century to avoid the worst aspects of climate change.

In order to achieve this district-wide carbon neutrality, the following areas need to be addressed:

1) Transport

Transport is the sector which creates the most atmospheric carbon in Kāpiti, being responsible for 57% of the district's total emissions. The data in a Greater Wellington Regional Council study earlier this year made it clear that private transport, especially private car use, is the key contributor.

Direct actions:

Sustaining and expanding the programme for more and improved cycleways and safe streets for walking and cycling is part of the solution. This means making roads safe for cyclists and improving bike infrastructure, such as shared paths and bike parks at common destinations.

This reduction in car use would need to be accompanied by a transition to electric vehicles. Although it is up to the Government to provide incentives to speed up the uptake in EVs, KCDC can help this process by putting more EVs and e-bikes into its own fleet.

KCDC also needs to back away from supporting more expressways which are encouraging car driving. For example, a recent and extensive housing development in Levin is being advertised as only a one-hour drive from Wellington, this only being possible because of the new roads. The result will be more and more cars driving longer distances. It makes no sense to invest in infrastructure that promotes our carbon intensive lifestyle, when we should be moving in the opposite direction.

Car use could also be discouraged by charging for carparks and providing less of them.

Indirect actions/advocacy:

KCDC needs to contribute to a transport system that is more convenient, comfortable, economic and reliable than cars.

This means advocating for a better bus system with regular, reliable and increased services using electric buses, along with more bus shelters, electronic timetable information and integrated ticketing with trains.

KCDC needs to be advocating for a better train system, with more frequent and reliable local trains, double tracking and electrification to Ōtaki, and an up-graded and more frequent Capital Connection. More room for bikes on trains and better toilet facilities for train users will also encourage train use. Ultimately, the whole train network will need to be expanded with a night train to Auckland, services to Hawkes Bay and more goods trains to replace trucking on the roads.

A better public transport system would also have other benefits such as a reduced demand for new roads, less traffic congestion, and a reduction in the need for car parks. Health outcomes would also improve as people use active transport methods more regularly.

2) Renewable forms of energy

KCDC should also be doing everything it can to incentivise the use of alternative forms of energy. It not only needs to use renewable energy for its own activities, it also should be encouraging the general public and businesses to use these alternative energies.

It should continue its program of installing solar PV systems at council facilities, for example on the Civic Building and Paraparaumu Library. It should also explore purchasing electricity and/or renewable energy certificates from local solar or wind energy installations (e.g. community owned) that are not located at council premises.

3) Reduction in Energy Use

As well as a transition to renewable energy, an essential part of the equation will be a reduction in energy use.

Direct actions:

Methods KCDC could immediately implement to reduce our dependence on energy would include incentivising insulation and double glazing in existing houses and encouraging the use of heat pumps for home heating.

However, bolder steps are needed. Urban sprawl, caused by the availability of cheap fossil fuels, is a major contributor to our energy intensive lifestyles. By living in compact, high density urban environments we can significantly reduce our energy consumption. This will require compact apartment complexes where public transport becomes viable because of the increased concentrations of population. Services, shops and public transport hubs would be within walking or biking distance of housing. In many areas of the world the concept of a compact "20 minute city" is being developed so long car trips are not necessary. Town planning decisions that direct us towards this more compact way of living will significantly reduce our carbon emissions.

Indirect actions/advocacy:

One way that Kāpiti could be made more compact would be by redeveloping some of the Paraparaumu airport into high and medium density housing. This area is near to shops and transport hubs. The additional housing could provide additional rates and help avoid strip developments up the coast that add to transport emissions. Development could potentially be linked to predicted retreat from the coast from rising sea levels. This move would also be beneficial in terms of reducing transport emissions in both the private car and aviation sectors as flying frequency too will have to reduce in order to meet New Zealand's and Kāpiti's carbon reduction goals. In recent years, ratepayer support has been needed to keep Kāpiti airport viable, but it is unacceptable to subsidise a high carbon form of transport in a climate emergency. Emergency lifelines need to be maintained of course – a smaller airport could still function as a forward base for helicopters supporting a civil defence response.

However, repurposing any land for urban development would be totally dependent on ensuring that issues around the ownership of the land are satisfactorily resolved. Tangata whenua, the original owners of the property, have had their legitimate claims to their land ignored since the end of the Second World War. Once this land is returned to the true owners, it would be largely up to them to decide how the land should be used.

As a result, it may not be possible to use the airport to develop a more compact urban environment. However, KCDC should still endeavour to implement planning that would make Kāpiti as compact as possible.

4) Land Use

Land use is an essential aspect of any Council Long Term Plan. There are several ways in which Council decisions about land use would reduce Kāpiti's carbon emissions and ensure community resilience in the future. The importance of compact urban form we have already mentioned. Another is developing carbon sinks through land use changes such as:

- Permanent reforestation of marginal council land resulting in a reduction in total emissions and carbon sequestration, as well as employment opportunities. This reforestation should primarily be with native species.
- The widespread planting of trees could also have tourism benefits by making Kāpiti a day-trip destination. An example is the Wainuiwhenua project which could become an attraction for walkers, cyclists and picnickers.
- Pursuing the carbon capture potential of re-establishing wetlands in low-lying areas.
- Determining which council land would be suitable for "meadowing" and then turning that land into meadows, this providing insect habitat and carbon capture.
- Encouraging the creation of more community gardens with associated composting schemes, for example, the Weggery Drive community garden.
- Council promoting and supporting the widespread use of regenerative principles in agriculture and horticulture. This would result in the sequestration of carbon, a reduction in dependence on fossil-fuel based fertilisers, an improvement in climate change resilience (drought resistance), an improvement in water quality in streams through reduced run-off, and major conservation gains – insects, aquatic life etc.

5) Waste Management

The waste review conducted last year provides ideas on waste reduction. This LTP is an opportunity to begin to implement them.

To encourage waste reduction, the systems that are used to collect waste and recycling must be progressive in that those residents who produce the least waste bear the lowest costs. Other innovative waste options include the separation of building waste at work sites to enable the reuse and recycling of materials

We need systems that reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from the waste. Essentially, this means organic waste must be composted in enclosed vessels to avoid the release of methane and nitrous oxide. These systems can be used to produce renewable energy.

To achieve these goals, Council may need to get directly involved in waste and recycling collection again, so they can take control of waste management and form the systems needed to encourage recycling and composting.

6) Future Resilience

KCDC needs to plan so that the community is more resilient to future climate change impacts, such as flash flooding, storm surges, and sea level rise with its associated rise in the water table. Council needs to ensure infrastructure repairs for sewerage and water systems and replacements are

prioritised in the Long Term Plans in ways that make them resilient to future climate change impacts.

A long-term response to rising sea levels and coastal erosion is needed. The community-led coastal planning process that council has initiated should continue. KCDC needs to ensure this process is not captured by groups of residents protecting individual properties. Also, funding should not be provided for short term fixes that either exacerbate longer term effects or which require continuing fixes to address on-going accumulation of climate impacts.

7) Economic considerations

With this emphasis on finding solutions to the climate crisis, we must not lose sight of the fact that any solution must be an equitable one. All too often it is those who lack power who end up paying when society has problems. The climate crisis will be no different. To avoid this we need to change the way we think about economics.

One such approach has been developed by Kate Raworth in her book *Doughnut Economics*. In essence, this model outlines a social foundation of well-being that no one should fall below, and an ecological ceiling of planetary pressure that we should not go beyond. It provides a balance between the minimum that we must all have to survive and a maximum that we all must keep below if we are to avoid economic growth that will kill the planet. Between the two lines lies a just and safe spot for everyone. KCDC needs to take this vision as a guiding principle in its future planning.

Conclusion

New Zealand is good at talking about climate action but fails at taking the appropriate action. A recent report ranked 43 industrialised countries for reduction of carbon emissions. Sweden was best with a decrease of 73% between 1990 and 2018. However, 12 countries actually increased their emissions and of those New Zealand was the second worst, with an increase of 57% over the 18 year time period. This result is not only disappointing, it is embarrassing.

The New Zealand Government has now declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2025, and KCDC has done so too. Let's hope that these words mean something. However, the time for talk has ended. We need to start taking serious action now.