

## **IMPROVING UTILITIES ACCESS TO ROAD, MOTORWAY AND RAIL CORRIDORS SEMINAR AND WORKSHOP: 19 FEBRUARY 2007**

### **Introduction and welcome**

Good morning everyone. It's a pleasure to be here today to talk about our road corridors, a topic close to my heart as President of Local Government New Zealand and in my former role as Mayor of the Hauraki District.

Let's face it corridors are so much a part of our daily lives that we seldom accord them any real attention and yet they are essential to the functioning and fabric of our society and the civilization we inhabit. So essential, in fact, that the very presence of corridors is a mark of civilization.

When the first recognizable urban communities arose at the end of the seventh millennium BC (8000 years ago), the concept of corridors was absent. At places like Catalhuyuk in modern Turkey, there were neither drains nor roads. To reach the roof-opening to your dwelling, you walked over your neighbours' rooves!

Despite the obvious inconveniences of such a place, it was a widespread and enduring urban form. If you recall images of ancient pueblos you will recognise it. In the barrios and slums around the sprawling cities of modern Africa and South America, access is often through adjoining shelters. Where corridors exist, they combine all functions at the surface, so that a track becomes a drain and a sewer.

Separation of these functions is the distinguishing feature of the invention of cities, civic society and civilisation. Drains, sewers and paved roads appeared in ancient cities, whether they were in China, Mexico, Pakistan or Iraq. If you visit the ruins of Ephesus, take time from admiring the splendid library to note the carefully paved streets, the water reticulation system through cylindrical pipes and the regular marble manhole covers to give access to the sewers.

And just as the habits of civilisation can be learned, they can be lost. Burials or holes for house foundations that intruded into paved roads or severed drains or sewers remain one of the clearest guides to the settlement of the English in formerly Roman Britain. James Cook had already sighted New Zealand before the English began to pave their roads to a standard that equalled the Roman "straights" and the fledgling colonies strung around our coasts were already settled before London again acquired a sewer system.

Those first colonies faced an almost impenetrable wall of swamp and forest. The funeral procession of the late Maori Queen last year was a reminder that the highways of early New Zealand were its rivers and its coast. Each new settlement forced tracks into the hinterland, with little thought to creating any sort of network of roads between colonies or provinces, and no thought at all to providing water or sewer networks.

Within just a few years, all this changed. The separate provincial governments were abolished in 1876. By that time an effective telegraph network linked the scattered settlements with the wider world. By 1881 there were telephone exchanges in all the major cities. As the central government began to link up the country by creating new

“Government roads”, their function as corridors for electronic communications and for carrying new-fangled gas and electricity reticulations was already being established.

As urban cesspits were banned and shallow wells became too polluted to use, an enduring tradition began in our towns and cities: laying down a fine all-weather metalled road and then digging it up to lay drains.

As we meet today, we bring together the legacy of our predecessors. The 75 Road Controlling Authorities of today are heirs to the 314 roads boards that existed in 1875, as well as the National Roads Board and the Urban Transport Council. That legacy, despite the names, is not roads and motorways. It is the complex, vital network of corridors that we must manage.

It is almost impossible to describe how dependent our communities, our society and our economy are on the services carried through the road corridor. The importance of the mobility of goods and people should not obscure the contribution made by the corridor’s less visible users.

After all, there would be no difficulty in transporting 60,000 people to Eden Park to see the Rugby World Cup; the roads are there. Take away the electricity, gas, water, sewerage and telecommunication services, however, and those roads would lead to nowhere.

Almost every road controlling authority controls one or more other services within the roading corridor. In addition, each authority must regulate, monitor or co-operate with the owners or operators of an expanding range of other services contained within that same corridor.

The owners of these utilities and the road controlling authorities are operating under a statutory regime that is now twenty years old. That regime was established to address a situation using the perceptions and criteria of the time. Some of these still apply. Some are no longer appropriate. Some are inconsistent or contradictory.

The regime allows one agency to comply closely with its requirements and thereby compromise the performance of another at the expense of the community that both agencies supposedly serve.

The New Zealand Utilities Advisory Group has been an initiative to try to resolve some of these problems by sharing information and adopting a co-operative or collegial approach to managing the corridor. Nevertheless, the underlying statutory regime ensures that undesirable conflict, inefficient co-ordination and unnecessary expense are too often a feature of the delivery of the services within that corridor.

This conflict within the statutory regime can be resolved only by the intervention of the central government. Such an intervention into such a vital aspect of our society and economy, however, cannot be undertaken hastily or recklessly.

I would like to acknowledge here, therefore, the work that has been done by the Ministry for Economic Development, and by Mike Sim of that ministry in particular.

He has sought to develop solutions that carefully balance the needs of the service suppliers and the communities they serve. This has been no easy task, as the demands for and expectations of these services continue to escalate without pause.

The challenge for us today is to consider the MED proposals and to bring to them the breadth and depth of knowledge of the corridor contained here to identify any issue that is not addressed. To assist in this exercise, several presenters will provide examples of issues or concerns that we hope will be resolved.

A presentation from Rotorua District Council on its co-ordination and management of services within the corridor might offer an example of processes under the proposed legislation. There are other councils with similar approaches. They might have ideas that can be included into the framework, too.

To be honest, though, many of us do not do this well. There remains a hint of truth in the old joke that the council waterworks crew would not dig up a road until the sealing crew had swept it and put down a nice new seal to make a clean working platform for their digger!

So, I urge you to participate fully, learn from others and share your wisdom. This is a unique opportunity to address the shortcomings of our present situation and create a platform for a more harmonious, efficient management of the corridor to ensure the optimum provision of services to our communities.

Thank you.