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Committee Wellington Regional Strategy Committee
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WRS Committee Engagement with Central Government

1. Purpose

The WRS Committee considered at its May 2007 meeting a report providing an overview of engagement options across the spectrum of Wellington Regional Strategy (WRS) stakeholders.

This report responds to a WRS Committee request for a follow up paper on options for engagement with central government, political parties and leaders.

Set out in this report are:

- An overview of fora and other mechanisms for achieving the linkage with central government stakeholders;
- Suggested approaches for WRS Committee engagement (including timing issues).

2. Approach to date

Engagement with central government entities (governance level, officials and organisations) over the course of developing the WRS has focused on communicating what the WRS is about, seeking ideas and inviting comment on initial thinking. Mechanisms used to date to promote or enable discussion around WRS issues have included:

- **Wellington Regional Leaders Group:** Inclusion of the WRS project on the agenda for the Wellington 'Regional Leaders Group' meetings. The meeting provides an opportunity for discussing issues of relevance to the region. This is a regular tri-annual meeting hosted by Wellington region's electorate MPs at Parliament. The group is chaired by the Hon. Marion Hobbs. Attendees are the Wellington Region's Members of parliament, the region's mayors and chairperson, the Regional Chamber of Commerce, and other invitees depending on the topics under discussion. The next meeting is scheduled for 29 June 2007.

- **Mayoral Forum:** The Wellington region's local government leaders meet every second month to discuss matters of common interest. This has included discussion on interactions with central government entities around WRS matters. Three of the Mayoral Forum meetings each year follow immediately after the Wellington Regional Leaders Group meeting described above. The next meeting of this group is 29 June 2007.
- **Wairarapa Combined Councils Meeting:** An existing mechanism for co-ordinating engagement with central government is via the three Wairarapa council's regular combined meetings. These are held on a quarterly basis to canvass a wide range of issues of significance to the Wairarapa. This includes prosperity and quality of life issues, and engagement with central government. These meetings have previously been attended by the Independent Chair of the WRS Forum, Chairman of the Interim WRS Committee, plus WRS Project Office support to discuss and share information on the WRS. The next combined council meeting is scheduled for July 2007.
- **Political Party Briefings:** Offers have been made to brief the region's central government politicians and political parties. These offers have been taken up by most parties. To date these have been undertaken by the WRS Forum Independent Chairperson (Murray McCaw), and subsequently involving the Interim WRS Committee Chairperson (Ian Buchanan). The most recent example is a briefing on WRS provided to the National Party's Economic Strategy Sub-Committee in April 2007 by Mr Buchanan and Mr McCaw.
- **Central Government Deputy Secretaries Group:** Meetings of the Wellington Region's local government Chief Executives Group (CEG) are occurring with the central government's Deputy Secretaries Group (co-ordinated by Mr Maarten Wevers, CEO of the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet). The aim is to identify and promote an 'whole of government' response to matters relevant to local government and WRS objectives.
- **Central Government Departmental Briefings:** Dissemination of information and updates on the WRS to individual government departments are ongoing via briefings from the WRS Project Director (e.g. Ministry for the Environment, Ministry of Economic Development, NZ Trade and Enterprise, Ministry of Social Development and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet).
- **Strategic Partners Forum:** Central government senior officials have attended and contributed to WRS briefings and workshops during the development phase of the WRS. This involvement would continue via the engagement program for the Strategic Partners Forum previously identified at the May 2007 WRS Committee meeting.
- **'One on One' Governance Level Briefings:** Individual discussions continue around WRS matters between local government leaders with Members of Parliament and senior officials on an ad hoc basis.

- **Electronic Updates:** Distribution of an e-newsletter is occurring quarterly to a database including central government stakeholders, plus web based resources enabling downloading of material.
- **Hard copy distribution:** Direct mail of WRS documentation to a database of around 1500 stakeholders (including central government agencies) has occurred on two previous occasions along with invitations to participate to central government entities (individuals, political parties and central government officials). Central Government departments who submitted on the WRS documents are also in receipt of a letter setting out the response to their submissions and the overall decisions taken on the WRS.
- **Project-specific engagement around particular topics.** Examples are:
 - the Maori Party has expressed particular interest and written in support of the *Genuine Progress Indicator* methodology endorsed for use in the WRS;
 - the Wellington Regional Labour Market Strategy development process was championed by MSD and Department of Labour to support WRS goals.

There has also been indirect engagement in WRS to the extent that central government stakeholders (via the budget ‘vote’ processes) are considering output of the WRS process in reviewing their own strategic plans and budgets.

3. Engagement Framework

3.1 Central Government Engagement Overview

A principle pursued in developing the WRS has been to encourage cross-party involvement in the WRS. The WRS process continues to seek to be ‘apolitical’ with a focus on issues facing the region.

This cross party approach was manifested through spokespersons for both the Labour led government (Hon. Annette King) and for the National Party (Katherine Rich) giving supportive speeches at the WRS consultation launch.

Central government stakeholders have a significant influencing and funding role to play around successful implementation of the WRS.

This requires broadly based, shared understanding of issues and opportunities facing the Wellington region at governance and operational levels. The engagement report considered by the WRS Committee at the April 2007 meeting sets out a timetable for interactions.

3.2 Mechanisms potentially relevant to WRS engagement:

As well as the engagement options already established the following are relevant for consideration and use:

- **Regional Leaders Forum:** This group meets twice a year with an emphasis on the community / social aspects across the region. Attendees are the region's local government Mayors and CEOs, ACC, TPK, Corrections, MSD and other community oriented organisations. To date there has been only very limited focus on the WRS initiatives in this forum.
- **Metro Sector Councils:** Comprising New Zealand's 15 larger cities this grouping of elected representative and senior officials meet four times a year to address items of shared interest for urban areas. The Metro Sector engages directly with central government on these matters. A key conduit for this is the Deputy Secretaries Group.
- **Local Government Zone 4:** Run under the auspices of Local Government New Zealand this provides local government in the lower quarter of the North Island a vehicle for dialogue with central government over legislative and other matters of interest to local government¹. LGNZ are able to request an audience with Cabinet to tackle matters of significance to a local government Zone.
- **Mayoral Task Force for Jobs:** This is an ad hoc group promoting employment promotion and development.

3.3 Recommended WRS Committee Engagement

Specific governance level interactions recommended for the WRS Committee via the Chairperson and Deputy Chair are continuation of involvement for the:

- Wellington Regional Leaders Group (3 times a year)
- Mayor Forum (5 times a year)
- Regional Leaders Forum (2 times a year)
- Political parties (annually)
- Metro Sector Group (issue specific within the 4 times a year this meets)
- Input via the local government chief executives group (CEG) to the Deputy Secretaries Group meetings (3 times a year)
- Input, if appropriate, via LGNZ Zone 4 processes.

It is recommended that a mandate be provided from the WRS Committee for the WRS Committee Chair and Deputy Chair to undertake necessary engagement activities on behalf of the WRS Committee in these areas.

Please note that other engagement mechanisms will continue to be operated in parallel by WRS Office staff (e.g. web based mechanisms, hardcopy documents etc.) to support and augment activity of the WRS Committee itself.

¹ See for details <http://www.lgnz.co.nz/about-us/membership/zones/>

3.4 Linkage between WRS Committee & EDA central government engagement

Both the WRS Committee and EDA Board need to undertake significant engagement activity with central government agencies.

The differences are that the EDA Board will target WRS project specific engagement (e.g. NZTE and MfE in relation to funding support), whereas the WRS Committee's focus on the high level overview is more oriented to overarching central government policy and direction setting.

It is proposed that co-ordination and alignment of this engagement activity with the WRS Committee be included as a part of the EDA Business Plan.

4. Communication

There will be direct communications with stakeholders following this meeting to inform them of the engagement process.

5. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 1. Receives the report.*
- 2. Notes the content of the report.*
- 3. Agrees to mandate the WRS Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to engage with central government stakeholders via the mechanisms set out in Section 3 of the report.*

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