

CURRENT STRENGTHS, FUTURE CHALLENGES

This framework aims to protect and enhance all that Wellingtonians love about the central city, while also making improvements where they are needed in response to current and future challenges.

The central city now

The success of any city is a product of history, geography, economics, architecture, planning – and, above all, people.

A great city has a distinct character and culture – an identity that inspires passion in those who live there and envy in those who do not. It is a destination – it draws people in, to work, shop, play, learn, and enjoy themselves. It has variety – it can meet a wide range of interests and tastes. It is easy to get into and get around. And it is intimate – it is built on a human scale, and so encourages the random encounters between people that spark friendship, creativity, and – increasingly – economic success.

There is much to admire in Wellington's central city. Though Wellington is small, it is New Zealand's most 'urban' in character. This is reflected in its high population density, compact urban form, creative and cosmopolitan atmosphere, variety of experiences on offer, and dynamic, ever-

changing population.

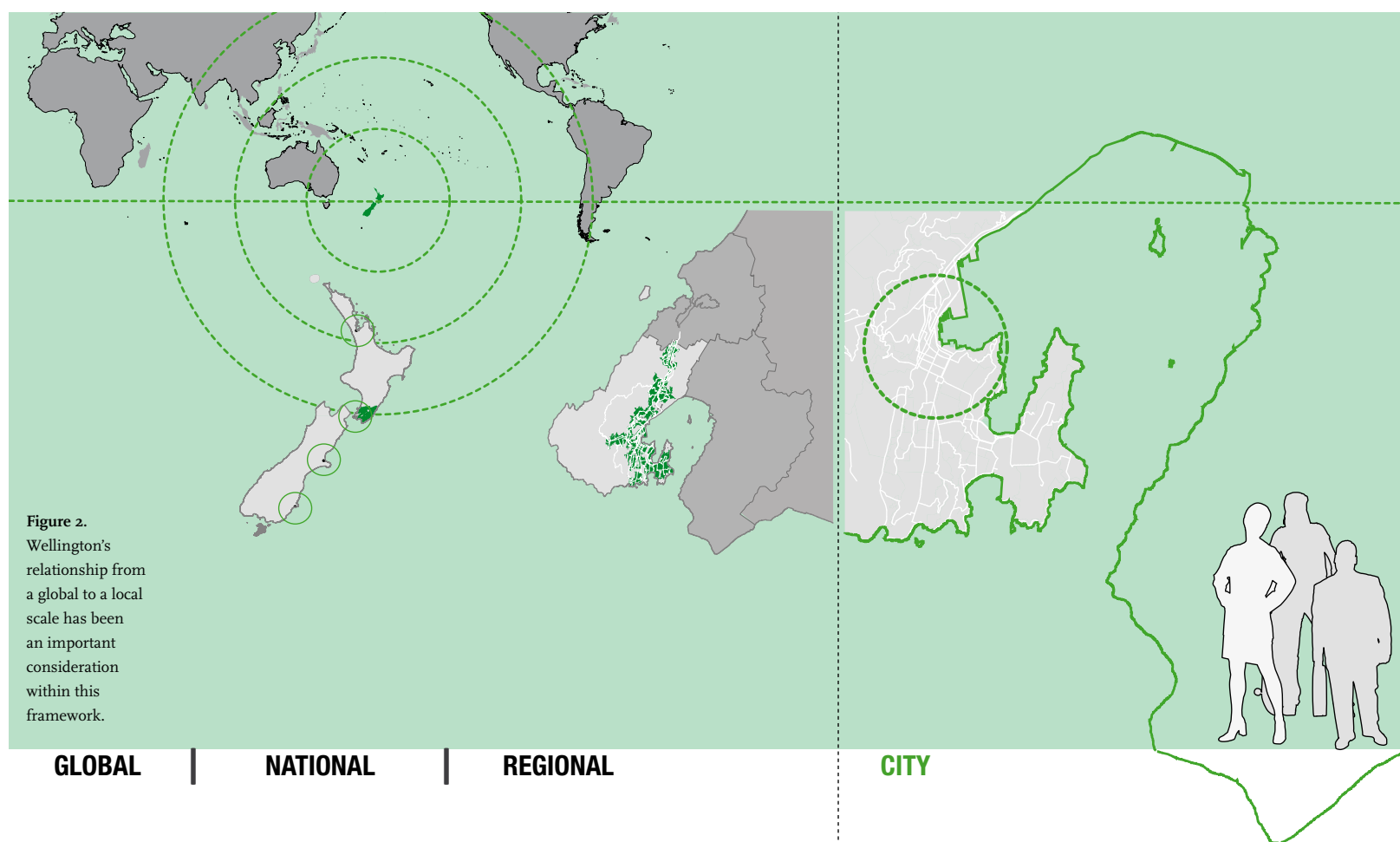
Key features of Wellington's central city include:

Compactness. The harbour and hills confine the central city within a fairly small footprint. Unlike most central cities, Wellington is small enough that it's easy to walk from one end to the other. This compactness, and the relationship between the city and the natural features that surround it, contribute to Wellington's unique character – making it an urban village with a wild edge.

A wide range of uses. Decades ago, the central city was dominated by government and corporate offices, with some light industry in Te Aro. It was quiet in evenings and weekends. Now, the central city is a vibrant area supporting a wide range of business, cultural entertainment/hospitality, and recreational uses. Increasingly, it has become a place to live as well as work – the number of inner-city residents grew by almost 50 percent in the years 2001-2006.¹

Distinctive shops. A large number of independent retailers gives the city a varied shopping experience, from the Golden Mile to the bohemian shops and cafés of the Cuba quarter. This gives the city a point of distinction when compared with the chain

1 Based on census figures.



stores and shopping malls that increasingly dominate smaller centres.

The heart of the cultural capital. The central city houses many of New Zealand's foremost cultural institutions and events, from Te Papa and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra to the New Zealand Festival, the World of WearableArt, and more. It is also home to many creative sector businesses. Wellington's creativity and heritage are reflected in its urban environment, for example through its growing range of public art. These central city features are the basis of Wellington's status as New Zealand's cultural capital.

Café culture. Wellington's intimate street layout and the cosmopolitan tastes of its people are reflected in the city's famous café culture. The cafés, bars and restaurants that line the city's streets provide informal meeting places and help to make the central city a magnet for Wellington residents' social lives as well as working lives.

Quirky and intimate. Wellington's geography has contributed to a 'fine grained' street layout, with many smaller streets and lanes. Though main streets largely run north-south, that pattern is broken by the quays which follow the natural shape of the

harbour. Together, these features give the city an intimate and quirky feel, particularly in the Lambton and Cuba precincts. That quirkiness is also reflected in the city's mix of building styles and public art. This street layout is important for the central city's vibrancy – urban planners believe that short blocks encourage people to take a variety of walking routes and so support a wide range of independent shops, cafés etc.

IN 2040

200 YEARS SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY OF WAITANGI

175 YEARS SINCE THE CITY BECAME THE NATION'S CAPITAL

PROJECTIONS FOR 2040

55 (STATISTICS NZ MEDIUM SERIES POPULATION PROJECTIONS)
THOUSAND MORE PEOPLE LIVING HERE

68 PERCENT OF ALL WELLINGTON CITY JOBS ARE IN THE CENTRAL CITY

People. The strengths of Wellington's central city reflect the tastes of the people who spend time there. On average, Wellingtonians are younger, more mobile, better educated, less car-oriented, and more affluent than the average New Zealander. This is particularly true for residents of the central city and inner suburbs. While the geography and built environment support their aspirations, it is the central city's dynamic population who give Wellington its creativity and cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Population density. Wellington City's compactness contributes to high-population density, both for resident and working populations. This helps to keep the city lively, both during working hours and in the evenings. It also means there are enough people to support variety in shopping, entertainment, recreation and other experiences. With more than half of the region's GDP coming out of the 2.1 square kilometres that make up the central city – its also a vital part of the economy.

Capital city status. Wellington's status as capital city is vital to the city's identity and ongoing success. Events ranging from protests at Parliament to Anzac Day commemorations contribute to urban vitality

and sense of place. Capital city status attracts businesses (both corporate and creative) and allows the city to sustain its population of highly-educated professionals. Capital city status also attracts media attention and fosters international connections that make the city much more cosmopolitan than a city of its size would otherwise be.

Natural setting. The significant ridgelines and hilltops, the coastline, the Town and Green Belts and the relationship of these natural elements to the grid street network integrates the city and nature in a way that no other New Zealand city does. All of these features together give Wellington its unique character, identity and 'sense of place' – allowing it to be at once intimate, cosmopolitan, quirky, wild, human, and creative. However, in some respects the central city is not as strong as it could be. For example:

Vibrancy. Some parts of the central city, such as Te Aro, have less intimate street layouts, and so shops, cafés etc tend to concentrate along main streets, leaving other areas less vital and vibrant.

Public space. In some parts of the central city – such as Tory Street – there has been rapid residential development, and retail and hospitality businesses have started to

follow, but development of public spaces and facilities has not kept up. Though inner-city parks are important, other changes such as wider pavements, improved street furniture, street trees and traffic calming measures can all make an area more people-friendly.

Building quality. Some central city buildings are of high quality and enhance people's experience of the city – others do not.

Legibility. Physical elements such as encroachments of buildings into street space, visual clutter, and barriers contribute to poor sight lines and make it difficult to find your way between the city and key destinations. This reduces people's choices. People can be a block or two from the waterfront but not be able to see or have a sense of the harbour.

Heritage. Though progress has been made, more could be done to acknowledge and celebrate Wellington's unique history, including its status as our capital city – key features of the built environment could be highlighted more effectively to tell Wellington's story.

FUTURE TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

In the next 20–30 years, all cities are going to face challenges that reflect both global and local trends. For Wellington, key challenges will include:

Competition. As technology changes and people become more mobile, cities are increasingly competing for skills, investment, and business. Smaller cities such as Wellington will increasingly be competing with larger ones such as Auckland, Sydney and Shanghai. To be competitive, we will have to be distinct. We will have to know our strengths, and offer not only opportunity but also outstanding quality of life. A dynamic central city will be important for the city's competitiveness.

Environmental and resource challenges. Larger populations, declining resources and the changing climate will change the ways cities operate. Resource use will have to become more efficient, and pollution and emissions volumes will have to fall. This will require more efficient transport, and may lead to people living closer to work and other services such as shops. With transport modes competing for limited space, some tough decisions will have to be made about the allocation of space between private vehicles, more sustainable modes such as walking and

cycling, and more efficient modes such as public transport.

Changing nature of business. Whereas an inner-city address was once vital for businesses, new technology now means that many businesses can locate anywhere and serve customers around the globe. This plan aims to provide precincts that will develop over time, giving businesses the choice of appropriate locations. This might see larger businesses as well as smaller creative businesses that rely on personal contact clustering in Te Aro.

Changing nature of retail. Small, independent retailers provide central Wellington with a crucial point of difference from suburban malls and shopping centres dominated by chain stores. Yet these smaller stores are facing increasingly fierce competition, both from chain stores and online outlets. If these smaller stores cannot survive, a vital element of Wellington's inner-city character will be lost. We must ensure opportunities for these stores are not lost.

Larger population and more demand for urban lifestyles. Wellington's central city residential population is likely to grow by several thousand people in coming decades. Though some of these people will find homes

in inner suburbs, most will live in CBD apartments and townhouses. The quality of apartments will need to improve, and developers will most likely have to cater for a wider range of residents, from individuals looking for ‘crash pads’ to families choosing an inner-city lifestyle. The city centre will need to provide services and recreation opportunities that take into account the often invigorating and changable weather.

Threats to character. The city has a wide range of building types and ages – which means it can support a mix of residents (from young artists to wealthy professionals), shops (for example, from high-street fashion to new local designers) and other uses. But continuing apartment and high end retail development, along with the changing nature of retail, may change this ‘mixed’ character over time.

City as a campus. The city is home to three universities. Each has a campus or schools either in the city or inner-city suburbs. The influx of new students and academics brings vitality and a continuous sense of renewal to the city. It places demands on accommodation and housing choices.

Policy settings. The Council has an important role in delivering regulatory and other services in an affordable and business-friendly way,

including making smart use of technology to improve the integration and cost effectiveness of services. It will also be important for the Council to develop a dynamic and ongoing relationship with businesses, providing strategic leadership and practical support to the diverse Wellington economy.

Resilience. Every city faces natural hazards. How well prepared a city is to mitigating and responding to their impacts is critical. As a city that is prone to earthquakes, Wellington is well advanced in its work to reduce the impact of such an event. It has in place some policy and regulations to address seismic strengthening of buildings, an established emergency management office, programmes for ensuring infrastructure is resilient, and a community that is aware of their need to be prepared. There is a need for ongoing focus on resilience.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Council has adopted *Wellington Toward 2040: Smart Capital*, a vision for the city's future. That vision explains the challenges Wellington will face over the next 30 years (some of which are explained above), and sets out a pathway for the future based on Wellington becoming:

a people-centred city – a city that is welcoming and friendly, provides opportunities for all, has strong neighbourhoods and communities, and embraces diversity and change

a connected city – a city with a smarter and stronger economy based on knowledge, skill and innovation

an eco city – one that moves steadily towards a low-carbon future based on 'green' innovations that also provide an economic edge and support an outstanding quality of life.

For this vision to succeed, Wellington needs a **dynamic central city**. It needs a central city that is vibrant and creative, that continues to be the engine room of the regional economy offering a wide range of experiences – while also becoming greener and accommodating more people. In the following pages, this framework explains how.



Figure 3.
This framework outlines the ways in which we can have a more dynamic central city.