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MEDIA STATEMENT

Councils agree

Regional cooperation took a giant step forward in Council chambers throughout the region this week. Councillors voted their support for a region-wide sustainable economic growth programme – the Wellington Regional Strategy (WRS) and a leadership structure to see it implemented. Seven of the eight councils who have considered the initiative gave it their support. In several cases, including Wellington City, the vote was unanimous.

Upper Hutt City Council is reserving its position and Carterton District Council is yet to consider the proposal. These two Councils represent approximately 5 percent of the regional economy.

“This is a victory for big picture thinking and for regional cooperation,” says WRS Chairman Murray McCaw. “There has been much comment about regional differences on issues such as Transmission Gully but this week the region’s councillors demonstrated outstanding leadership. They have endorsed a strategy that is the most significant initiative of its type ever undertaken in New Zealand.”

The Wellington Regional Strategy is a sustainable economic growth programme. Its goal is to build an internationally competitive region through realising Wellington’s economic and lifestyle potential. It has been developed over two years with input from government, business and voluntary sector interests. The Strategy will be launched for public information and feedback in October.

“The initiatives contained in the Strategy have the potential to deliver enormous benefit for the region. High on our list of priorities is establishing direct air services

between Wellington and Asia. This means Wellingtonians won't have to travel via Auckland or Christchurch," says Mr McCaw.

Mr McCaw said the region's economic clock was ticking and the need for economic transformation was paramount.

"Successful regions offer the trifecta of a great lifestyle, a strong economy and therefore good career prospects. We have a great lifestyle but our economic output is modest by international standards and this isn't sustainable. Major Australian cities also offer lifestyle advantages, with the added benefit of significantly higher incomes"

The Regional Strategy will be 'governed' by a committee of the Greater Wellington Regional Council. It will include the Chairman of Greater Wellington, six councillors selected from the region's local authorities and five eminent Wellingtonians.

Interim Chairman of the committee, and Greater Wellington Chairman, Ian Buchanan said the leadership structure is likely to be a trailblazer for other regions in New Zealand.

"This structure accommodates local authority interests but ensures decisions are taken in the best interests of the region. Throughout we'll be seeking community buy in and ownership. We're in the process of selecting the five independent members and the calibre of the candidates is outstanding. We will have the business equivalent of the All Blacks working on Wellington's behalf," he says.

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