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MEDIA RELEASE

Hang together - survey

Councils of the greater Wellington region are being urged to hang together in developing the regional economy following the results of a region-wide survey released today.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to the Wellington Regional Strategy (WRS). The statement which drew the strongest level of agreement was:

It is important that Councils work together to develop the economy of the whole region

The average level of agreement with this statement rated 4.4 on a scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

Chairman of the interim WRS committee Ian Buchanan said the survey was a clear signal for Councils to hang together on the regional strategy. "We (the councils) have had our differences as the strategy has evolved, but ultimately Councils have recognised the need to work together on this. It's pleasing to see such a strong endorsement from the public," he says.

The survey was undertaken among 1500 members of the public and 400 businesses during October and November.

Respondents were also firm in their view that regional development success was not just about the economy, and that governance of the WRS should not be restricted to elected representatives. The second and third ranked statements were:

- *Regional development success should be assessed by measuring improvements in the environment, society, and culture, as well as the economy – average agreement level 4.1*

- *It is important that the committee which oversees regional economic development should include leaders from different groups in the community as well as the mayors and other elected representatives –average agreement level 4.0*

In the area of funding respondents were generally supportive of investment in economic development but wanted to see costs kept in check. One option contained in the survey proposed an annual funding increase of \$1 per \$100,000 of property value and another proposed an increase of \$2.50. Respondents were slightly inclined (3.1 on agreement scale) to support the lower increase and slightly disinclined (2.7 on agreement scale) to support the higher increase.

Mr Buchanan said there was a remarkable consistency of views across the region, and between businesses and residents. “When we broke the results down we found there was very little difference between local authority areas. Again this is a strong endorsement for regional cooperation because the views of ratepayers are consistent across boundaries,” he says.

The WRS is a sustainable economic growth strategy that has been developed over the last two years by the region’s local authorities in partnership with central government and the business, education, research and voluntary sectors.

The strategy was subject to a six week consultation period which resulted in 440 submissions. Public hearings for those who wish to make a verbal submission will take place on 4, 5 and 6 December in Wellington and Upper Hutt.

Mr Buchanan said the research, combined with the public submissions, provided robust feedback to assist the hearings committee in its deliberations.

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