



Local councils have a vital role to play in issues such as transport. They can either allow commuting cars to clog up city roads or invest in energy efficient public transport.

Responsibility for Transport

Apart from RMLR, local authorities will have several other new responsibilities, in particular for regional transport. The effects of the way we use our transport are now becoming more and more well known – the transport sector uses about 30 percent of the total fuels burnt every year just to move around. If you add to this the fuels required to provide all the support services, like constructing and maintaining roads, building vehicles and making the materials they are built from, this figure rises to over 50 percent.

Not only does this represent a serious drain on the fossil fuel resources we have, it also contributes over half the carbon dioxide produced every year to the greenhouse effect and global warming. The obvious way to do something about both these problems is to promote a system in which people use their cars less, public transport more and don't travel so far – and this is where regional and local governments come in.

A new transport law has just come into operation in New Zealand which will have a profound effect on transport issues. Regional governments have again been given a large part to play and they will now control the provision of all transport facilities within a region from roads to public transport. Here again, there is a good opportunity to encourage sustainability by promoting a better public transport system instead of more facilities for private motorists.

In particular, the Regional Passenger Transport Committee, an offshoot of the regional council, will have the responsibility for deciding which public transport routes there



should be, their timetables and the fare structure which will operate within the region. The question is going to be whether these committees accept the challenge of designing a public transport system that genuinely attempts to provide services that people can use as an alternative – or whether they merely bow to the existing ethos and carry on providing for cars.

In addition to their role in the planning of public transport within their region, councils will also be responsible for deciding which companies operate services. All public transport operators will have to compete for the right to operate on a route and it will be the regional council's job to decide which operators get which routes. If they chose to, there would be nothing stopping them from preferring companies which show a concern for sustainability. Again we come down to the question of political will!

However, even if a better public transport system is created, new routes and timetables that encourage people to use them don't

automatically mean that people will use them. And there is still the problem of encouraging people to reduce the length and frequency of their car trips. One answer to these questions lies in planning and the District Scheme – and how local councils plan their planning.

Mixed Land Use Planning

The way that we plan our land can have a considerable impact on transport requirements. One of the keys lies in what is called mixed land-use planning. By zoning to ensure residential, shopping, employment and recreational facilities are within easy reach of each other, peoples' main needs can be satisfied within the area in which they live. They won't therefore have quite the same reasons to make long journeys as before.

Planning can also be used in other ways to promote a more sustainable use of transport. Many people don't use public transport because there isn't anything within a reasonable distance so the thing to do is plan areas