

**WHENUAPAI  
INFORMATION PACK**

## **INFORMATION SHEET ON WHENUAPAI AIRBASE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Current Status**

- The airbase consists of 311 hectares located in Brigham's Basin, 15% of the land area of the basin. 60 hectares on the base is vacant and could be suitable for other uses.
- Current expectation is that it will take five years before the RNZAF fully departs.
- Some defence activities may need to remain indefinitely e.g. Seasprite Navy helicopters
- There are currently 23,000 take off's and landings per annum at the airbase.

### **Infrastructure**

- There are three runways, but really only one serviceable for commercial flights. This runs southwest-northeast with a length of 2031 metres and is used for 95 % of all movements. It is the fourth longest runway in New Zealand.
- The airbase has capacity for 200,000 aircraft movements per annum. However it is only operating at about 5% of this i.e. currently about 23, 000 aircraft movements p.a. (AIAL Mangere has around 150,000 air movements p.a.)
- Although the main runway was built in 1940, it is still in serviceable condition but will need some work in the medium term.
- main runway can accommodate aircraft up to size Boeing 737 and 767s. However it is too short for Boeing 747s. Ultimately it could be extended to a maximum possible runway length of 2,711 m.
- 75% of takeoffs are in a south-westerly direction away from North Shore City towards the Waitakere Ranges.
- There is a passenger terminal in place with baggage handling facilities.
- There are also existing precision approach systems, fire and rescue services, and control tower services (provided by Airways Corporation).

### **Aviation Services**

- Because of runway limitations, the airbase cannot be used for long-haul flights. The furthest range flights would be to Pacific Islands (Fiji, Samoa, New Caledonia etc) and Australia (eastern seaboard cities only). Max range on suitable aircraft is probably 3700 km for international flights.
- However there is no limit on domestic aviation, except that Auckland International Airport effectively serves as Air New Zealand's hub for connecting flights and this function will be hard to displace.
- A probable commercial flight schedule would concentrate on point-to-point domestic and international travel. This would target domestic business travel to Wellington and Christchurch, tourism travel to Queenstown and Rotorua, and international travel to selected destinations e.g. Gold Coast, Sydney. This would probably generate no more than 15,000 aircraft movements per annum.
- Commercial flights would probably be quieter and less intensive than current military use. Commercial aircraft are quieter than the Boeing 727s currently in use, and there would not be multiple landings/take-offs as currently with the Hercules.

- Other possible aviation uses of the airport could be for air training schools (Massey University), charter flights, charter cargo services, very short haul domestic (Whangarei, Kaitia, Kerikeri, Hamilton), or general aviation (recreation, private training, private travel).

### **Economic Impact and Opportunities**

- It is estimated that the current airbase contributes \$256 million per year to the Waitakere/North Shore/Rodney economies. It is Waitakere's single biggest employer, with 1067 personnel.
- There are 453,000 people currently living within 16 km of Whenuapai. This is virtually identical to the 442,000 living within 16 km of Mangere.
- 27% of families within 10 km of Whenuapai have an income over \$70,000, compared with only 14% within 10km of Mangere.
- Whenuapai is closer to the Auckland City than Mangere, and would provide a 33 % travel saving time to CBD travellers. (New Zealand Herald, 22/1/03)
- 23 % of total national imports and 15% of the total value of exports are by air cargo.
- 48 % of air export tonnages are in primary products (fish, fruit, vegetable, meat). 49% of the Auckland region's primary producers are in Rodney, Waitakere and North Shore.

### **District Plan**

The Whenuapai Airbase (“the Airbase”) carries an “MD1 Defence Purposes” designation on the Proposed District Plan maps. That designation is further qualified on the central (airfield) part of the base with an “Airfield” notation. This is the major part of the airbase, containing the runway areas, the hangars and associated buildings, administration buildings and base housing. Another small area to the east of Totara Road has a “Sewage Treatment” notation and a separate site on the corner of Bristol and Dale Roads has a “Communications” notation. Defence housing adjacent to the Whenuapai shopping centre has a “Housing” notation. Smaller areas on Kowhai Ave and Kauri Road have (otherwise unqualified) Defence Purposes designations.

The underlying zoning of most of the airbase is Countryside Environment. Housing areas in Ngahue Road and on Kowhai and Kauri Roads are in a Rural Villages Environment.

Appendix II to the District Plan planning maps outlines designated flight paths. These paths extend for some distance beyond the airbase and above the ground, in the line of the runways.

The planning maps also indicate Ldn 55dBA and Ldn65dBA noise contours, again extending beyond the base in the line of the runways.

The legal description of all relevant designated sites appears in the Designations section of the Waitakere City District Plan.

That section also outlines restrictions relating to operation of the Airbase. Briefly, these require that aircraft operations may not exceed 65dBA (Ldn) outside the 65dBA contour, and may not exceed 55dBA (Ldn) outside the 55dBA contour (this is except in cases of emergency or similar unusual event).

With regard to private landowners, there are restrictions relating to the approach paths and noise contours as shown in the planning maps. Any building or resource consent for land generally within 1,000m of the main runway and 500m of the subsidiary runways requires Ministry of Defence approval. Buildings may not be erected beyond climb/ horizontal and conical surfaces as identified in the district plan, but this does not affect any building up to 8 metres in height.

Under the plan's general noise standards any new houses, schools or hospitals erected between the Ldn 55 and 65 dBA contours, and any additions to the same within the 55 dBA contour, must have acoustic protection to achieve an internal 40dBA Ldn standard.

New houses, schools or hospitals erected within the 65-dBA contour are listed as a Prohibited Activity.

In the case of the underlying zoning of the airbase, activities are essentially restricted to residential uses (one house and one minor household unit per site) and farming activities. There is some provision for non-residential uses, subject to Discretionary Activity approval. Over most of the airbase there is a 4ha minimum subdivision standard.

It is expected that existing use rights would apply for aircraft activity if the designation was uplifted, but this would need to be confirmed by legal advice.

It should also be noted that one exception to the above relates to the district plan noise contours and associated restrictions. They are part of the district plan rules rather than the designation and would continue to apply, without the opportunity for objection, even if the designations were uplifted.

### **Regional Growth Strategy- Sector Agreement**

The Auckland Regional Growth Strategy is an agreed strategy by the Territorial Authorities of the Auckland Regional Council to manage the growth of the region over the next 50 years. Under this the strategy the Whenuapai area would not be urbanised for the foreseeable future.

As part of the strategy, territorial authorities agreed to develop "sector based agreements" to manage local issues in a manner that is consistent with the overall growth strategy. Waitakere City is part of the Northern and Western Sectors Agreement, which also includes Rodney District, North Shore City, and the Auckland Regional Council. In October 2001 the North and Western Sectors Agreement was signed off by all sector partners.

The Northern and Western Sectors agreement contains specific reference to Whenuapai Airbase, and also identifies the importance of economic development as part of the growth strategy.

Section 4.5 "Future of Former Airbase Land and Remaining Airfield" states the following:

*"Agreed Principles*

*Sector Partners will:*

1. *Recognise Hobsonville as a strategic area for employment.*
2. *Ensure that any future development enhances the strategic accessibility of the Hobsonville site.*
2. *Recognise the current role of Whenuapai as a military airbase and keep options open for its future use.*
3. *Recognise the current role of Dairy Flat and Parakai as high volume, private airfields.*

#### *Agreed Actions*

*Territorial Authorities in the Northern and Western Sectors will:*

1. *Consult each other regarding any changes to the status of development proposals for Hobsonville, Whenuapai, Parakai and Dairy Flat.*

*Territorial Authorities in the Northern and Western Sectors will jointly:*

- 2. *Investigate options for the future use of Whenuapai airbase taking into account their feasibility and potential positive and negative effects.***

#### **Regional Transport Initiatives**

The Upper Harbour Corridor, which links Waitakere City to North Shore City via Greenhithe, is identified as a strategic transport corridor in the Regional Land Transport Strategy. Transit New Zealand has started the construction of a new State Highway 18 motorway link through this corridor, which is planned to be completed in 2008. A full diamond interchange is planned for Brigham's Creek Road, which would provide motorway access to Whenuapai Airbase from North Shore City and the South. Current average peak hour travel time to the CBD from this area is 30 minutes.

Access to the north is via Brigham's Creek road connecting to SH 16. A new SH 16 Motorway northward extension is planned for 2007/2008. Waitakere City is working with Transit on appropriate connections to this motorway to reflect the potential of commercial use of Whenuapai Airbase.

In the longer term a passenger transport connection has been identified, and planning for the new motorway has included protection of additional land along the corridor for either bus or rail.

8 million passengers travel through Auckland International Airport annually and it is estimated that this will increase to 18 million people by 2010 (see *Auckland Regional Land Transport Strategy 2003* page 88). Significant transport infrastructure investment will be required as a result. A second airport has the potential to spread the demand for roading infrastructure.

The region is also embarking on a \$32 Million upgrade to the ferry service. The programme includes expansion of ferry services to the North including Greenhithe and Hobsonville, with possibilities identified at Herald Island (Whenuapai).

#### **Summary**

The airbase represents a substantial physical resource in a strategic location. Because of the combination of existing use rights and the current infrastructure it

would be difficult if not impossible to replicate this resource for Auckland. The long-term options for a second airport in the Auckland Region need to be carefully considered. Council is adopting an approach that would test the viability of a commercial airport at Whenuapai and enable the identification of issues and effects.

## Council Resolutions

In December 2002 the Council passed the following resolutions regarding the future of Whenuapai Airbase.

1. *That the Chief Executive be instructed to work with the Commander of the New Zealand Defence Forces or relevant officer of the New Zealand Defence Forces together with all relevant Returned Service Associations of the Hobsonville and Whenuapai air bases to ensure that a fitting physical memorial to their service to the City and nation is constructed and maintained within Waitakere City.*
2. *That Waitakere City Council support and promote the development potential of commercial activities at Whenuapai in the interests of wider economic development in a manner consistent with the growth objectives of the City.*
3. *That Waitakere City Council request that the Chief Executive ensure that any future development of the Whenuapai air base not preclude it functioning as a functioning commercial air port.*
4. *That Waitakere City Council maintain an option for a shareholding interest in any airport company that may be created to operate Whenuapai air base.*
5. *That Waitakere City Council recognise the sensitivity of the upper Waitemata Harbour, and provide for sustainable water management based on the principles of the Water Cycle Strategy.*
6. *That Waitakere City Council in its approach to the development of Whenuapai recognise Council's commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi.*
7. *That Waitakere City Council recognise the potential of the Whenuapai air base as a model of sustainable development particularly in relationship to sustainable economic development and efficient use of energy.*
8. *That Waitakere City Council ensures a fair allocation of the costs of providing infrastructure and public assets in the development of Whenuapai airbase.*
9. *That Waitakere City Council in its approach to the development of the wider Northern Regional Strategic Growth Area give priority to land uses that promote economic development.*
10. *That Council requests that the New Zealand Defence Force or other Crown entity retain ownership of the Whenuapai Airbase Land for the foreseeable future to ensure the long term potential of the air base as an operating airport is retained.*
11. *That the Chief Executive be authorised to cement in place strategic alliances to achieve the aims of recommendations 1 to 10.*

## **THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH INFRATIL LIMITED**

Waitakere City Council passed a number of resolutions at its December 2002 Council meeting supporting and promoting potential commercial airport activities at Whenuapai Airbase.

Council's starting point is that there is an existing airport operating at Whenuapai (albeit a military airport) that contributes significantly to the social and economic well-being of the City and the Region. If the option for commercial operations at Whenuapai of a second airport for Auckland is foreclosed it will be difficult if not impossible to replicate.

Council has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Infratil, who are the owners and operators of Wellington Airport, to test the viability of commercial operations at Whenuapai Airbase. This will establish:

- The commercial feasibility
- Economic Impacts
- Environmental issues in relation to the permitted base line of the existing operations at the airport.

The Council has chosen to partner with an experienced operator so as to bring the necessary skill required to establish the requirements for a commercial operation.

The Council will not be required to expend any capital as a part of its agreement with Infratil.

There are processes around the Crown disposal of the airbase that the Council will seek to engage and assist through its partnership with Infratil.

There are also processes around the regional and local planning frameworks, including establishment of the "existing use rights" of the airbase that the Council will seek to engage and inform.

If a commercial airport at Whenuapai proves to be viable council will retain a shareholding at no cost in a commercial airport operation.

## **QUESTION AND ANSWERS ON WHENUAPAI**

- **What does Whenuapai mean?**

Whenuapai means "good earth". This is evidenced by the number of horticultural businesses in the general vicinity.

- **How long has Whenuapai been an airport?**

Conversion of land in Whenuapai to an airforce base began in 1938. The concrete runways were constructed during World War 2. In 1945 it opened to civilian air traffic, and remained Auckland's premier airport until 1965, when Mangere opened.

- **How many flights are there currently?**

Data from Airways Corporation show that in 2002 Whenuapai handled over 23,000 aircraft movements. (This compares with 147,000 movements at Mangere). This existing level of air traffic at Whenuapai is similar to that at provincial airports such as Gisborne, Napier, and New Plymouth.

- **Who owns the land?**

The Crown acquired the land in 1938 by a Proclamation by the Governor General under the Public Works Act, 1928. However the airbase land is wholly contained within the area of jurisdiction of Waitakere City Council.

- **When will the Airforce leave?**

On 9 December 2002 the Crown signalled that it would downsize New Zealand Defence Force operations at Whenuapai and vacate the base within the next 1-5 years. Subsequently the Government said it would issue a paper giving more details on the timing and process for withdrawal. This is expected to be released in early September.

- **Will there be good roads to an airport at Whenuapai?**

Yes. Transit New Zealand is already building a new motorway (State Highway 18) that will link the Northern and North-Western Motorways. A full interchange will be installed at Brigham's Creek Road, less than 2 kilometres from the airport.

- **Would a second airport at Whenuapai reduce traffic congestion?**

Passenger numbers at Auckland International Airport have grown at 4% per annum since 1995. At this rate of increase in the future, there will be double the current passenger numbers by 2020. With stimulation to the air market by budget airlines and new entrants, this rate of increase is expected to be higher. Already there are 7,500 employees and 24,000 passengers visiting Mangere every day. Many of these are coming from areas to the north of the region, and are contributing to congestion on the Auckland isthmus. Waitakere City Council is currently undertaking preliminary traffic modelling studies to explore the impacts on regional traffic flows.

- **Whenuapai has been touted as an issue of regional significance – recently North Shore expressed its interest. Why then is WCC the main driver and backer of this study?**

Firstly the land contained within Whenuapai Airbase is entirely within the jurisdiction of the Waitakere City Council, and secondly because the closure of the base affects the society and economy of Waitakere City most directly.

- **What experience does Infratil have in managing second airports in major cities around the world?**

Infratil has existing investments in Wellington and Glasgow Prestwick airports, and has managed for other companies the acquisition of Perth, Darwin, Alice Springs, Dusseldorf, Hamburg and Bristol.

- **Does the Council presume that at some point it may have a shareholding in an airport company?**

Waitakere City Council acknowledges that it has no right over Whenuapai. The Crown owns that land and is determining the process for its future. However, Waitakere City Council has an obligation to ensure that the long-term interests of the City and its citizens are taken into account. Council does not wish to rule out taking an interest in a possible future operation and believes it wise to undertake preliminary work now.

## **FAST FACTS ON WHENUAPAI**

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE EMPLOYED AT WHENUAPAI: 1067**

**NUMBER EMPLOYED AT PEAK: OVER 1800 (Base Auckland, 1992)**

**NUMBER OF YEARS BEFORE DEFENCE FULLY DEPARTS: 5**

**SIZE OF LAND OF BASE: 311 hectares**

**KINDS OF AIRCRAFT USING WHENUAPAI: Hercules, Andovers, naval helicopters, Airforce 757's,**

**YEAR COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS CEASED AT WHENUAPAI: 1966**

**HOW DOES THE CITY RECOGNISE THE AIRBASE: through the District Plan**

**WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING ZONING OF THE LAND: "Countryside Environment"**

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN 16 KM OF WHENUAPAI: 453,000**

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING WITHIN 16 KM OF MANGERE: 442,000**

**DISTANCE FROM AUCKLAND CBD: 21 KM**

**ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF WHENUAPAI: "GOOD LAND"**