

OUTCOME 2 – TRANSPORT – ENABLED DEVELOPMENT

A comprehensive public transport node that improves accessibility supports growth and enables high-quality development.

Among the highly prized qualities a city can offer are places linked to many destinations by rapid and reliable passenger transport seamlessly integrated into the built form and public realm, where walking is a pleasure, it is safe to cycle and people gather for recreation and entertainment.

Despite its sometimes humdrum appearance, the Aotea Quarter is set to experience major change. Within the next 10 years it will experience unprecedented transformation in terms of access, resulting from the development of the Aotea Station as part of the City Rail Link (CRL), the Wellesley Street bus improvements, Victoria Linear Park, Nelson Street cycleway and the possibility of Light Rail Transit (LRT) along Queen Street. This significant transport investment resulting in tens of thousands of additional people having easy access could be a catalyst to the quarter becoming a high-quality growth node, as identified in the CCMP 2012.

As the 20th century unfolded, Auckland sought to embrace the international urban planning move to create dedicated civic and cultural centres, as in San Francisco's Civic Centre and London's Southbank. At Aotea, Auckland found an opportunity to create a similar hub for the rapidly growing city, while also seeking to address traffic congestion on Queen Street – then the city centre's main thoroughfare for vehicular traffic – by creating Mayoral Drive as a bypass.

Today in the quarter core we are left with a partially realised legacy from this period. The CAB and Aotea Centre, as well as the Town Hall, Bledisloe House and Skyworld (formerly the Metro Centre), define the edges of Aotea Square. Underneath

the square lies the 900-space Civic Car Park, with twin entry and exit portals from Greys Avenue and Mayoral Drive. However, around the edges of the core are large areas of undeveloped land, which have been used for little more than surface car parking for the past four decades or more.

Collectively these four undeveloped sites – Bledisloe West (to the rear of Bledisloe House), Aotea Centre ('backlands' abutting Mayoral Drive), the CAB site and South Town Hall (between Queen Street and Greys Avenue) – represent the largest and most significant development opportunity in the quarter and possibly the city centre.

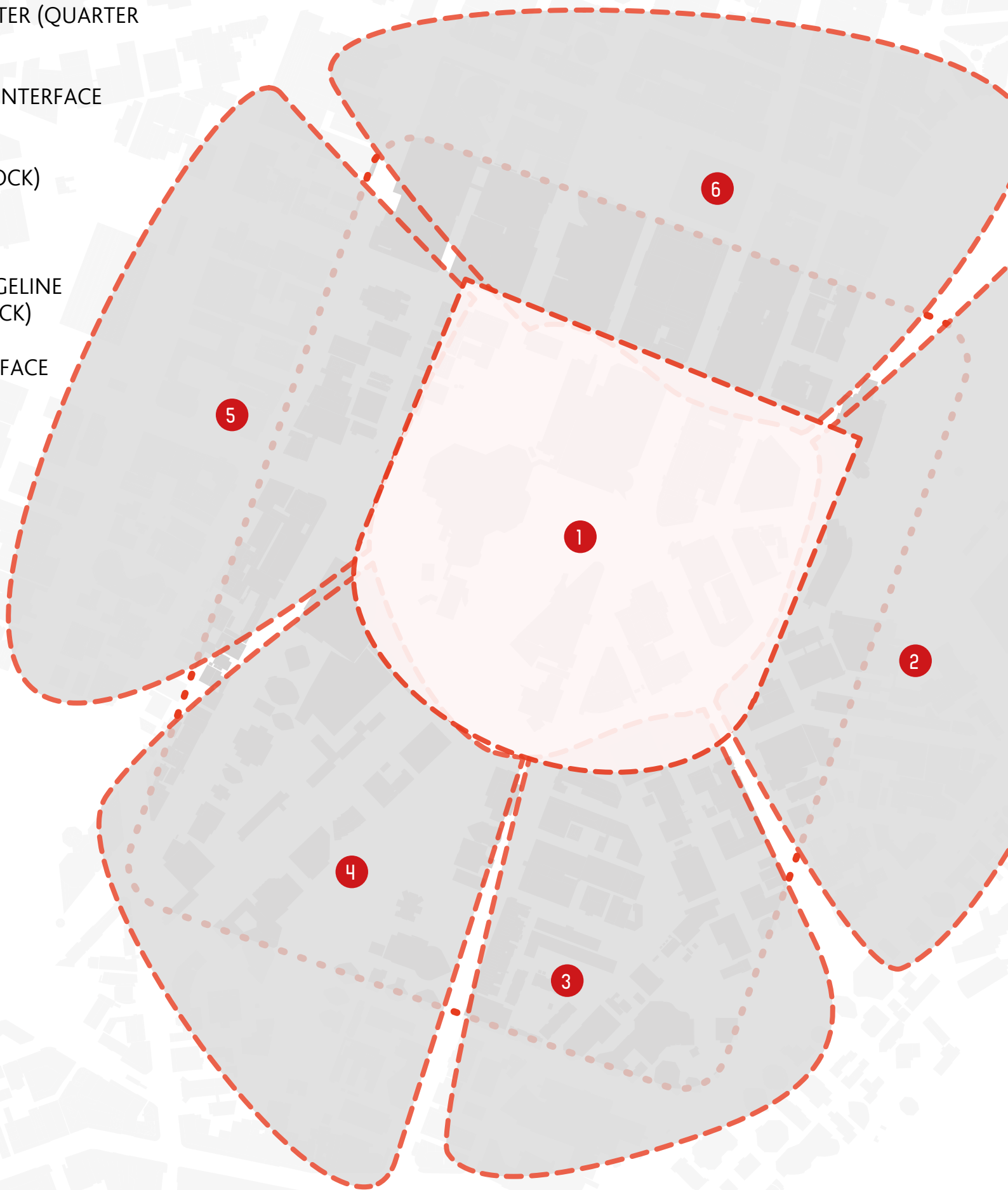
Quality, sympathetic development is paramount to achieving the vision for the quarter core – bringing increased activity and intensity to the daily life of Aotea Square and the wider public network, and increased use of public transport.

There is considerable flexibility in how each site could be designed and developed, although some fundamentals need to be acknowledged – defining and activating primary occupied frontages, pedestrian linkages and the mix of activities. Respect for the heritage, including the modernist period of the CAB, Bledisloe House and the Aotea Centre, is also important.

With tens of thousands of bus, rail (and eventually LRT) passengers entering or passing through the quarter daily in the future, it is all the more critical for the quarter to become a high quality urban space.

“Because all the attention, and money, will be on the waterfront, there is the freedom to rethink Aotea as a new kind of public space, perhaps a truly public, truly civic space for all Aucklanders.” Design community focus group

- 1 HEART OF THE QUARTER (QUARTER CORE)
- 2 LEARNING QUARTER INTERFACE
- 3 QUEEN STREET EAST (AIREDALE STREET BLOCK)
- 4 MYERS PARK
- 5 HOBSON STREET RIDGELINE (FEDERAL STREET BLOCK)
- 6 ENGINE ROOM INTERFACE



SUB AREAS PLAN

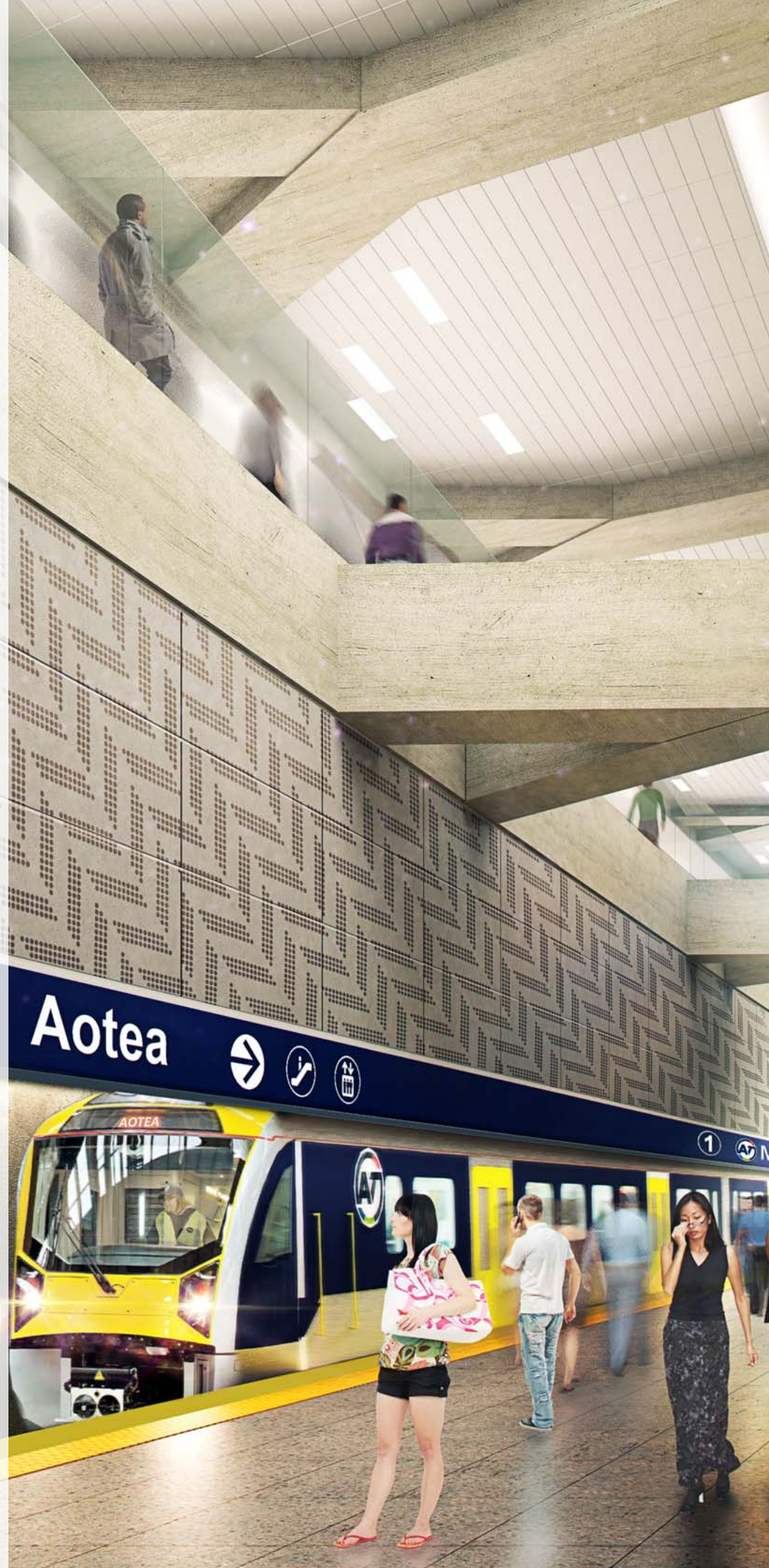
1. CITY RAIL LINK (CRL)

The CRL is the proposed 3.4km underground rail line linking Britomart and the city centre with the existing western line near Mt Eden. A new rail station is planned in each of the Aotea and Karangahape Road quarters, as well as a full upgrade to Mt Eden Station in the Newton Quarter. Preparatory work has now started along Albert Street. The entire project is scheduled to be complete by 2023, depending on funding.

Aotea Station will be built using a cut and cover methodology, 11 metres under Albert Street between Wellesley and Victoria streets. Entrances will be on the site of the Griffiths Building, 42-44 Wellesley Street West, and on the southern side of Victoria Street, either side of the intersection with Albert Street.

The station will fundamentally change accessibility to the quarter, with no need to walk 10-15 minutes to Britomart Transport Centre. Aotea Station is expected to become the busiest on Auckland's rail network, reflecting the large catchment that includes the city centre's highest-density residential and employment areas, and the universities. This will bring tens of thousands of passengers through and to the heart of the Aotea Quarter, creating a daily footfall of people who could be leveraged to better enjoy the offer there. Over time, Aotea Station is likely to drive change in the land-use mix and may well lift values.

The CRL project is also future-proofing for a potential North Shore rail line to connect with Aotea Station, which will also be an interchange point with buses – particularly those heading north-south along Albert Street and east-west along Wellesley Street.



2. WELLESLEY CIVIC PUBLIC TRANSPORT STREET

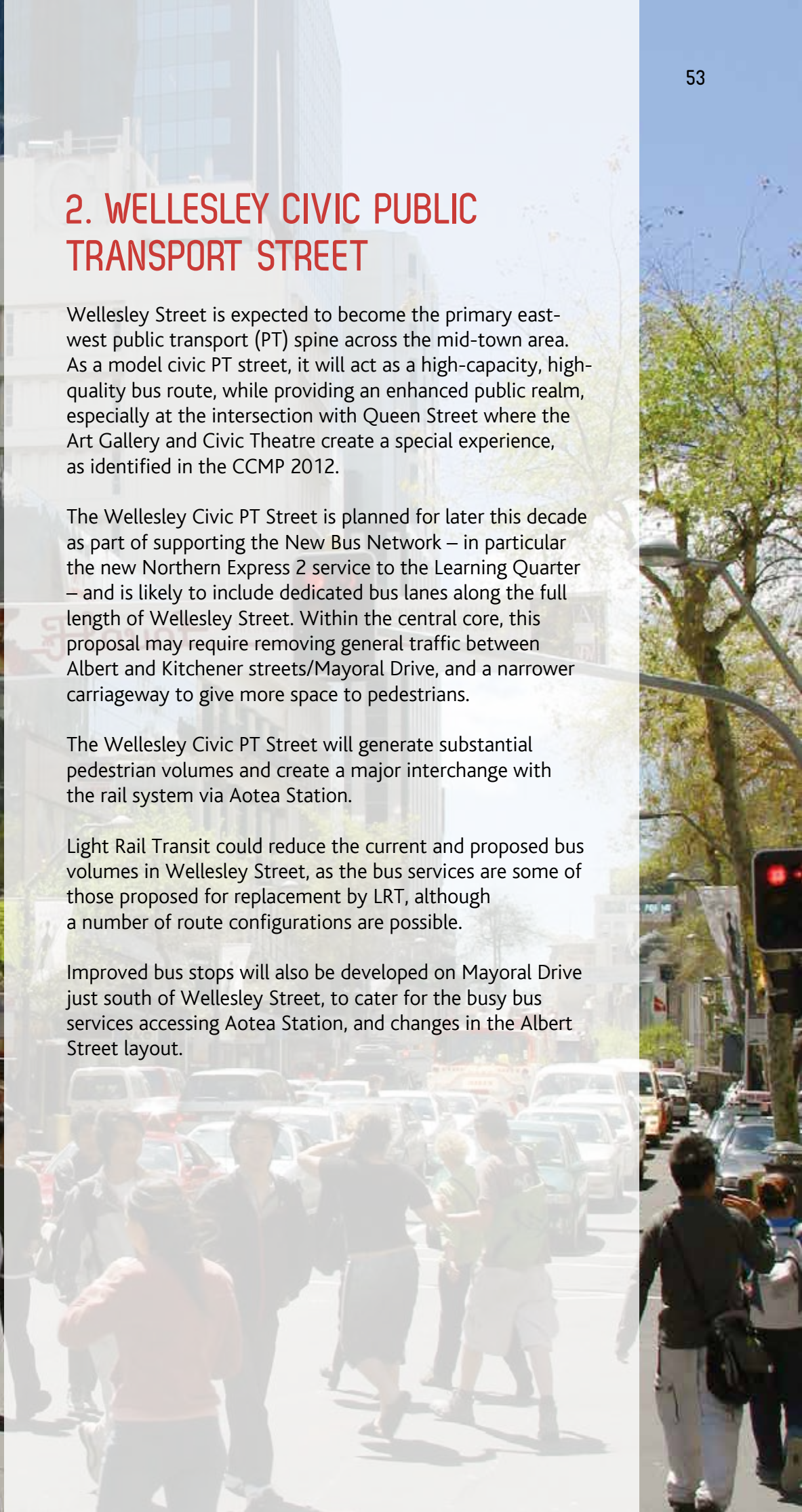
Wellesley Street is expected to become the primary east-west public transport (PT) spine across the mid-town area. As a model civic PT street, it will act as a high-capacity, high-quality bus route, while providing an enhanced public realm, especially at the intersection with Queen Street where the Art Gallery and Civic Theatre create a special experience, as identified in the CCMP 2012.

The Wellesley Civic PT Street is planned for later this decade as part of supporting the New Bus Network – in particular the new Northern Express 2 service to the Learning Quarter – and is likely to include dedicated bus lanes along the full length of Wellesley Street. Within the central core, this proposal may require removing general traffic between Albert and Kitchener streets/Mayoral Drive, and a narrower carriageway to give more space to pedestrians.

The Wellesley Civic PT Street will generate substantial pedestrian volumes and create a major interchange with the rail system via Aotea Station.

Light Rail Transit could reduce the current and proposed bus volumes in Wellesley Street, as the bus services are some of those proposed for replacement by LRT, although a number of route configurations are possible.

Improved bus stops will also be developed on Mayoral Drive just south of Wellesley Street, to cater for the busy bus services accessing Aotea Station, and changes in the Albert Street layout.



3. LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (LRT)

The City Centre Future Access Study 2012 identified that even with the City Rail Link (CRL) and bus improvements, Auckland's growth will outstrip its road capacity and there will still be significant issues of access to the city centre by 2021. In response, Queen Street, which had a major upgrade in 2008, is set for further enhancement with a proposal to run LRT, carrying 450 people per vehicle at a frequency of one every eight to 10 minutes.

The proposed LRT project is currently in the investigation and feasibility stage, and the funding and programmes are still being defined. If it proceeds as planned, the first stage would run from Wynyard Quarter to Britomart, along Queen Street and down Dominion Road. Future extensions are also proposed to several isthmus north-south corridors (Mt Eden, Sandringham and Manukau roads), making the Aotea Quarter even more accessible. Up to three stops may be built in or near the quarter, the most notable being near the Town Hall.

If LRT goes ahead as currently proposed, the possibility of limited or no vehicles on Queen Street opens up real opportunities to change the nature of many streets that connect with Queen Street, such as at the Wakefield/Rutland intersection and Lorne Street.



4. WALKING AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

In 2010 the council commissioned a pedestrian amenity study, which included time-trialling a series of test walks through key parts of the quarter, including from Aotea Square and up to the YMCA and AUT on Wellesley Street. When the same trials were held in 2015 it was revealed that waiting times at signalised intersections in these locations had reduced by about 45 per cent when averaged across all the walks.

Another important project that will further enhance north-south walkability and orientation through the quarter is the Waitemata Local Board-sponsored Mayoral Drive underpass upgrade, due for completion in mid-late 2016. The project involves removing the car parking in the underpass, widening the full extent of the space, commissioning Māori artwork and improving the lighting.

However, there is much more work to be done. The dish-shaped topography of the Aotea Quarter offers a distinctive Auckland identity, as well as varied and interesting walking routes. Yet the notable changes in level – particularly west of Greys Avenue, due to the cuttings made during construction of the Civic Centre and Mayoral Drive – are still significant barriers to easy access.

In developing this framework, Be. Accessible (a social change agency with a mission to create a truly accessible country) were engaged to audit the core of the quarter and develop a series of short-term quick wins, as well as longer-term interventions for the most compromised areas west of Queen Street.

"It is easier to fly from Scotland to Auckland than to move from Queen Street, through Aotea Square to Mayoral Drive and Wellesley Street." Blind walking tour participant



5. CYCLING

The ability to cycle easily and safely to and through the Aotea Quarter is currently varied, although the situation outside the quarter is improving rapidly. The completed Grafton Gully and Nelson Street cycleways form an arc-shaped link around the city centre to a range of destinations. But with only one separated cycle lane in the quarter (up Vincent Street), much more can be done to provide a cycle-friendly network.

The online map used on shapeauckland.co.nz during the development of the framework illustrated a strong desire for better cycle facilities up Queen Street, especially between Mayoral Drive and Karangahape Road. Options for improvements along this spine will be integrated into planning for the possible LRT route along Queen Street, which could reduce cars and increased shared spaces.

A complementary east-west cycle through the quarter could connect the Nelson Street and Grafton Gully separated cycleways. Cook Street (which formerly connected through to the Auckland Town Hall) could provide this link, which could then weave across the quarter and up to Grafton Gully.

Extra cycle and pedestrian-friendly linkages are also possible to increase the quarter's integration from the west. Improved facilities including storage are also possible.



6. CAR PARKING

The Aotea Quarter is blessed with one of Auckland's largest underground car parks: the Civic Car Park. Located under Aotea Square, this major facility provides 939 parking spaces (currently 170 short-term and 769 long-term). There are a large number of other parking buildings, both public and privately operated, within walking distance. Additionally, there remains within the quarter some areas of surface car parking currently available to the general public, such as at South Town Hall, on sites that will be redeveloped over the next 10 years.

While the quarter benefits from this relatively abundant provision of underground parking in such direct proximity to the major arts and cultural venues, there is a need for more efficient and innovative management of the Civic Car Park to ensure maximum availability of parking for all (including more short term and accessible parking). This is particularly so during evenings where there is regular heavy demand with multiple performances in the quarter's major venues.

Future changes in the provision of car parking must take into account the coming major improvements in access to the quarter by public transport. After 2023, the Aotea Station will bring tens of thousands of Aucklanders within easy reach of the quarter every day. Alongside well-connected and more frequent bus services, potential light rail, and ongoing walking and cycling improvements, many more people will change the way they choose to visit the quarter in future.



7. MAYORAL DRIVE

The creation of Mayoral Drive was a major event in Auckland's urban history, causing significant and permanent disruption to the grain and pattern of development in the Aotea Quarter. Designed as a traffic bypass, it cut the quarter core off from the hillside urban neighbourhoods to the south, and has proved a major barrier for pedestrians and cyclists. In particular, intersections are very wide and the sweeping slip lanes, to ease traffic flow, make for staggered and challenging crossing opportunities for anyone on foot or two wheels. There is also a lack of safe, high-quality mid-block crossings to link the core with surrounding areas across Mayoral Drive. The rampart-like construction of the ring road has also resulted in some significant and sudden level changes between the road and surrounding areas of the quarter, compounding issues of accessibility and wayfinding.

"Crossing Mayoral Drive is like running the gauntlet." Walking tour participant

Aside from its shortcomings for walking and cycling, Mayoral Drive has one of the finest street tree avenues in the city centre. The value of these tulip and lime trees should be recognised, protected and enhanced in any development or upgrades.



PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Most participants found the dominance of cars on the major streets detracted from bringing the area together cohesively. A predominant theme has been a desire to see improved connections around the area, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists; both residents and visitors. This emerged as a top priority for most participants. In particular, slow phases for pedestrians at key crossings were a source of frustration, and there was concern about heavy bus traffic on Mayoral Drive making it less accessible for people on foot to cross or cyclists to use.

People were keen to see the City Rail Link in place and LRT but felt that it was still a long time off, and that other ways to attract business and residents to the area should be worked on while transport solutions are developed.

People also recognised that the terrain through the quarter was uneven, at a range of elevations, as well as a range of surfaces, making it difficult for people with mobility challenges to navigate. A number of people felt that the uneven surfaces and terrain in the quarter make it difficult for anyone to navigate. Participants suggested accessibility around the quarter was a considerable issue. Uneven surfaces, lack of way finding, handrails and ramps were all cited as concerns. A full accessibility audit was suggested.

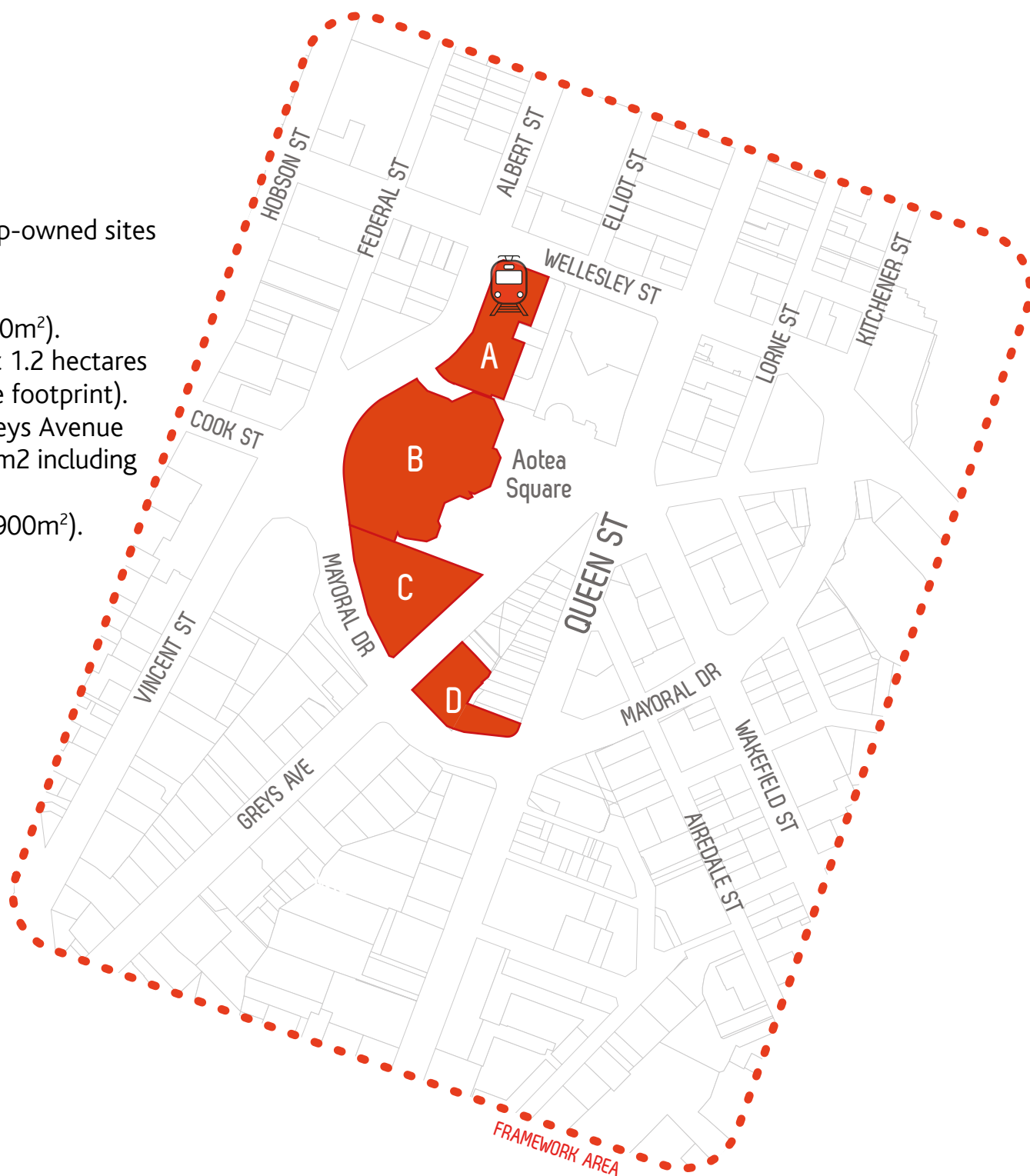
Public feedback from cyclists and non-cyclists was in favour of better provision for cyclists throughout the quarter and connecting other areas in the central city and inner suburbs. Queen Street was strongly viewed as the spine that could be made more cycle-friendly, along with Mayoral Drive, lower Grey's Avenue through to Aotea Square, Vincent Street through to Albert Street and Wellesley Street that were all identified as key areas for cycle infrastructure improvements.

The ongoing availability of parking, particularly short term parking, would remain important as surface carparks are removed with redevelopment over time.

DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Four broadly contiguous, council group-owned sites are available for redevelopment:

1. Bledisloe West car park (about 4650m²).
2. Aotea Centre and surrounds (about 1.2 hectares including the 8000m² Aotea Centre footprint).
3. Civic Administration Building, 1 Greys Avenue and surrounds (approximately 5000m² including CAB footprint).
4. Town Hall South car park (about 1900m²).



Council owned sites

The CCMP 2012 considered their development potential alongside privately owned sites as part of the drive to make the quarter a high-quality, rail-enabled growth node.

To achieve this ambition, the following design and development principles have been developed:

QUARTER-WIDE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES

1. Augment activities that reinforce the civic quality and public life of the quarter, and the flourishing arts and cultural scene.
2. Facilitate the transition towards remarkable inner-urban neighbourhoods well stitched into the quarter core.
3. Leverage off the foot traffic and dwell-times resulting from the transit-orientated hub at Aotea Station.
4. Improve the public realm with the sequences and spaces that offer delight and discovery to support the arts, civic, cultural and entertainment scenes.
5. Showcase Auckland's most innovative, sustainable building practice.
6. Engage early with mana whenua on co-developing narratives, and influence design decisions based on the Te Aranga principles when preparing development proposals.
7. Provide universally accessible public routes between Aotea Square and Mayoral Drive.
8. Transcend topography around new or redeveloped buildings where external public lanes cannot provide this.

QUARTER CORE DESIGN PROMPTS

A design workshop was held to test these design principles, which also identified a number of further design considerations or prompts that can help inform the future development of each of the key development sites and their relationship to the wider quarter core. These considerations include:

- Understanding the distinctive identity and character of the quarter core that has strong contrasts between the traditional, compact and street-based architecture of Queen Street in the east and the modernist, landscape-based built form, public spaces and linkages to the west of Aotea Square.
- Seeking design and development outcomes that are responsive to the basin landform and landscape linkages that are sympathetic to the modernist architectural forms of the Aotea Centre and CAB and Bledisloe Buildings
- Layers of activity to anchor the destination.
- Environmentally sustainable design, including microclimate (e.g. facing the sun).
- Anchoring landmarks and dramatic entrances.
- Additional meeting points and tributary spaces.
- Great streets for all (universal access, connections and desire lines).
- Landscape linkages between spaces and sequences.
- Natural and cultural history, revealing the narratives.
- Car circulation, access and parking/life underground.

Development sites in the Aotea Quarter core

The next section informs the design briefs and concept planning for the four sites, and presents design requirements to consider alongside those in the District Plan/Proposed Auckland Unitary Plan.



