

# THE RMA is the LARGEST Source of CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS in NZ

As Government unveils its First Emissions Reduction Plan for Aotearoa New Zealand, the elephant in the room is the fact that 47% of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution is due to transport, and has increased by 90% since 1990. The First Reduction Plan attacks the symptoms, not the cause. The cause is the RMA.



*Why has transport pollution increased by 90% since 1990?* Because almost every district plan under the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) is based on the American transport-based zoning model. Simply put, homes are in one zone, jobs, schools, shops and services in other zones. To accomplish the mundane chores of daily life one must drive.

**VMD:** The First Reduction Plan primary target should be the urban planner's rule of thumb that every new home adds 10 motor vehicle movements per household per day (VMD). It's very simple: only allow new developments with less than 1 VMD.

This is not a panacea. It won't fix all the existing developments throughout the land that are based on transport zones. That's called retrofitting. Cutting VMD in existing zoned communities promises to be complicated, expensive and politically divisive.



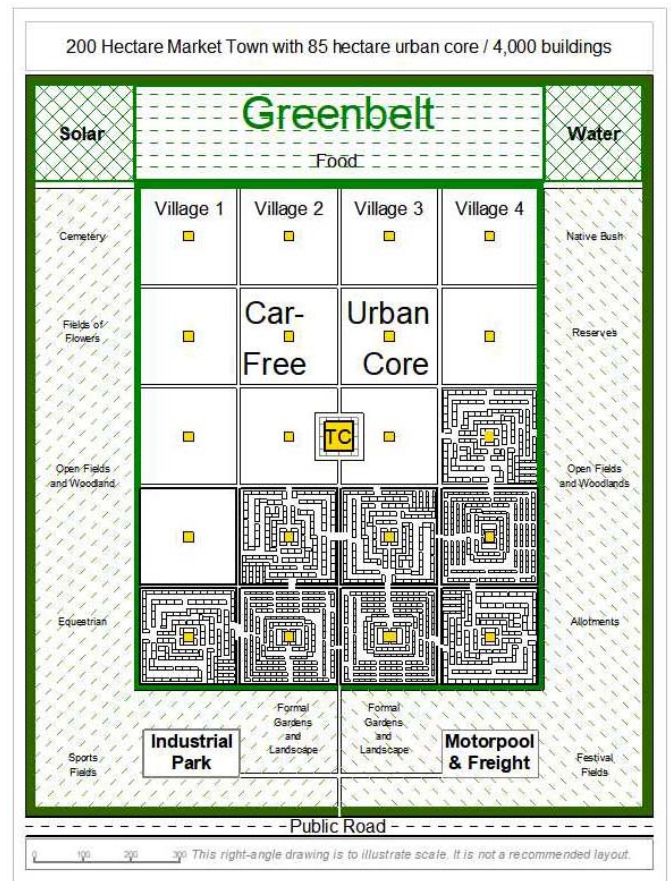
But new development should be the prime target of the Emissions Reduction Plan. No new developments based on transport is easy, cheap and politically attractive.

## What is the alternative? How can we achieve near-nil VMD?

In planner-speak, it's called *mixed used zoning* - a contradiction in terms since *mixed-use* is the opposite of *zoning*, but since it

is familiar to the industry, using it means less to explain. But it's not just residential activity with a bit of smaller scale commercial activity mixed in.

To achieve near-zero VMD, plan self-contained, self-supporting local communities where all day-to-day destinations are within walking distance. That means all jobs, all shops and services, all schools and recreational activities and no outbound commuters. Conceptually, it looks something like this:



Note the two boxes at the bottom. That's where motor vehicles terminate. No cars, trucks or buses within the urban core.

## How can it work under the RMA?

Begin by identifying where people go on those 10 VMD and moving those destinations so they are within walking distance. In other words: *move destinations not people*. This means understanding how a local economy works – what jobs, shops and services people go to every day, and then determining the critical mass population to ensure locally those jobs are economically viable.

## Economic Critical Mass

Critical mass analysis is already done. The town needs 10,000± people living in 4,000± buildings to provide critical mass for local-to-local (L2L) businesses. Rather than market homes first-come/first-serve, when the project begins, it looks to fill 250± L2L job types - from accountants to [zythepartists](#) (look it up). It sets out the number of L2L jobs a 10,000 population town

requires. For example, it needs no less than three barbershops with three barbers each.



L2L works out to up to 80% of the total local jobs. The other 20% of the jobs are local-to-global (L2G) meaning people who can work anywhere there is good broadband. They become the money importers to provide a 5X money turn.

**Whenua:** The next critical factor is *whenua* – contiguous land including the kāinga (urban core), and surrounding greenbelt to prevent cross-boundary conflicts; its non-residential natural space. The optimal total *whenua* size is about 200 hectares with its inner urban core covering about 40-45% (85± ha).

The greenbelt serves many purposes. It cuts rural-neighbour objections to the proposed new kāinga/market town. All they will see is a belt of trees. With no outbound commuters, their roads will not suffer congestion. They will get a new regional economic engine in their midst but without the adverse effects that accompany American-style zoning. The Greenbelt also enables energy and water self-sufficiency. No new burden on the power grid, no digging up roads to bury new council pipes.

**The People:** The social benefit comes in how the urban core is designed. While 10,000 people is the optimal economic number, the social critical-mass number is much smaller. People thrive best in communities of 250 to 750, where they know each other and take care of their own. To achieve this, segment the town into clusters – call them villages – of about 200± buildings (500± people) each.

### How to enable people and communities

During the founding of the town, future residents identify which cluster/village appeals to them, and using a charrette process, the founding villagers set out the look and feel of their future village. The RMA describes this in its core purpose as *enabling people and communities to provide for their economic, social and cultural wellbeing* – an aspiration mostly ignored by the failed practices that have given NZ its largest source of CO<sub>2</sub> pollution. Thanks to modern technology, that charrette process can now be done online.

This front-ending of future residents has numerous benefits lost in conventional planning. People get to know each other. They become stakeholders – quite literally. It also makes selling the homes much easier as people already have social networks – shared commonality where they crowd-source their future

neighbours. In a multi-cultural society, this commonality provides a stronger sense of safety and social connection than new development devised by government planners or conventional private developers.

### Shared public space means smaller, more sustainable homes



A critical design feature of each village is a careful balance of private and public space, where the public space enables people to fulfil their social needs with smaller, hence more environmentally-efficient homes. Each village is built around a public plaza with affordable and accessible amenities they frequent daily. The plaza has a village-owned café where everyone can afford three nutritious, flavourful meals a day if they don't want to cook at home. Primary school classrooms and child care are on the plaza, significantly lowering the capital cost of education, and providing children with 24/7 adult role models. Each plaza has a community-owned, self-insured nursing care facility so no one, regardless of infirmity, is forced to leave their community. And to ensure support for the creative class that makes community-life more vibrant and prevent gentrification, the development funds artist guild halls on each plaza.

### Stable affordable housing: eliminate economic polarisation

A critical element in an increasingly polarised world of the haves and have-nots, 20% of the housing is “parallel market”, meaning ownership is structured to always remain affordable to those who cannot compete with higher income or high-net-worth buyers who increasingly displace the have-nots. By building affordability in at the onset, and ensuring affordability forever, the community remains a complete, not elite, community regardless of how desirable it becomes (and it will become desirable).

The government has the means to build kāinga/market towns today. Called the Urban Development Act, the properly-named Kāinga Ora holds the authority it needs to draft the prototype plan, then find the most suitable land and implement the project. And in doing so, it ends up costing the taxpayer nothing. Instead, it becomes a profit centre for the host council and central government, because its demand on rate and taxpayer services are much lower than the current American-style transport-zoned developments.

To learn more about the details, see [www.markettowns.nz](http://www.markettowns.nz)

---

**For publication**

**Word Count:** 1200 – If a shorter Op-Ed is required (say 1,000 words), please contact the author.

**Image copyright and fair use:** All images belong to the author except Auckland pollution (see <https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/6158/auckland-pollution>) – fair use, and the barbershop (see <https://pixabay.com/photos/barbershop-old-time-chairs-1522487/>) – no attribution required

**Author:** Claude Lewenz

**Contact:** 027 629 3000

**Personal Email:** [lewenz@gmail.com](mailto:lewenz@gmail.com)

**Work Email:** [markettowns.nz@gmail.com](mailto:markettowns.nz@gmail.com)

**Bio:** Claude Lewenz headed a team looking for practical, doable solutions to the many challenges facing people and nations in the world today. The MarketTown concept emerged from that work. Claude has written books on the subject, given TED talks, and built a team of technical experts prepared to implement the project as soon as government cuts the red tape to enable it to happen.

However, timing is everything. Before government will act, the pain needs to grow until it breaks through a threshold. Housing must become unaffordable [check]. Climate change has to begin to bite with heat, drought, flood and even the threat of famine [check]. The global economy must start to break down, where governments begin to realise they have to provide for their own, not rely on vulnerable systems. [check]. The time has come.