Opportunities and Challenges in Peri-Urban Recreation

Research in New Zealand’s Fastest Growing Cities

Adrian Field
Hamish Mackie
Melody Oliver
Kim Arcus

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Contact: Adrian Field, Synergia
adrian.field@synergia.co.nz
tel +64 21 529 805
CONTEXT
Our background

- Community-based sport and recreation research
- Health and social impact assessment of urban strategies
- Human systems – transport, sport and recreation sectors
  - Influence of social and built environment on people’s behaviour
- Policy, evaluation, economics and human movement research
Why peri-urban recreation?

The perception...  

...vs the modern reality
Why peri-urban recreation?

- Areas on the periphery of urban cities and towns
- By 2006, 83% of population live in urban areas
- Peri urban areas marked by relatively lower population densities, and rapid land use change
- Under-explored in NZ
  - Reis et al noted importance of outdoor recreation sites within or close to urban centres as settings for family activity

Howard’s 3 Magnets
Research questions

- Are peri-urban areas a potential area of significant growth in demand and supply of outdoor recreation within the context of changing demographic trends and participation preferences?

- How do opportunities for outdoor recreation in peri-urban areas relate to those in areas further away from towns and cities?
Method

• Demographic analysis of project population changes in the cities and four case study areas, alongside 2007/08 Active New Zealand Survey data.
• Online survey of people from local government, regional sports trusts and other organisations in Auckland, Tauranga and Hamilton
  – 36 respondents in total
  – Snowball sampling, upper end of expectations
• Qualitative interviews with 15 recreation planners from councils and regional sports trusts
• Qualitative interviews and focus groups with 30 parents/caregivers of children under 16 years from four case study areas
  – Beachlands-Maraetai and Waitakere Village-Taupaki in Auckland
  – Rototuna in Hamilton
  – Bethlehem in Tauranga
Case study areas: Auckland

Waitakere-Taupaki
4000 population (2011 estimated)

Beachlands-Maraetai
6900 population (2011 estimated)
Case study areas: Hamilton and Tauranga

Rototuna
14,300 population (2011 estimated)

Bethlehem
7100 population (2011 estimated)
Demographic trends and impacts

Population changes

• 5.4 million population by 2031
• Ageing population
• Ethnic diversity

• Significant growth in case study areas projected to 2021
  – From 10% in Waitakere to 34% in Beachlands-Maraetai

Recreational impacts

• Increasing demand on infrastructure in fast growing areas
• Growing demands for informal recreation opportunities (e.g. walking, tramping, running, mountain biking and horse riding)
• Recreation demand diversity
  – Walking
  – Gardening
  – Swimming
  – Cycling
  – Fishing
PLANNER PERSPECTIVES
Promotion of outdoor recreation in peri-urban areas

Promoting outdoor recreation in peri-urban areas was not as important as outdoor recreation in general, but still over half rated it important or very important.

Importance on promoting outdoor recreation within peri-urban areas (n=26)

- 4% rated it not important at all
- 15% rated it somewhat important
- 23% rated it very important
- 27% rated it extremely important
- 31% rated it very important

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Importance of peri-urban by area

Auckland

- 0% not important at all
- 13% very important
- 27% very important
- 47% very important

Hamilton/Waikato

- 0% not important at all
- 25% very important
- 25% very important
- 50% very important

Tauranga/BoP

- 0% not important at all
- 14% very important
- 29% very important
- 43% very important
Respondents indicated the demand for peri-urban recreation opportunities was increasing, with two thirds stating demand was increasing in some areas, and a quarter indicating increasing demand in many areas.
Role of peri-urban recreation in encouraging outdoor activities further afield

Overall peri-urban activities provided some form of support or encouragement

Almost half indicated a moderate level of encouragement, while a quarter indicated significant levels of support
Peri-urban priorities

• Responding to demand for range of recreation opportunities
  – Managing demands of urban growth within this
  – Balancing recreation values against other values (e.g. conservation, farming)
  – Making opportunities available widely and increasing participation
• Provision of facilities and managing demand
  – e.g. club/field facilities, multi-sport
• Provision of open space
  – Maintaining enjoyment of unique features
  – Accessibility of parks and reserves
• Meeting general and high needs population requirements
  – e.g. children and young people, casual family activities

• Partnerships across organisations/sectors
  – e.g. iwi, council, community and tourism
• Recreation infrastructure
  – e.g. walkways, cycleways, parks, playgrounds
• Making environment relevant
  – e.g. engagement/activity, contact with nature
Areas of demand for peri-urban recreation

- City growth increasing demand pressure and supply issues
- Biking (of various forms – road, mountain and MX), walking and coastal activities are key areas of growth
  - Unstructured recreation opportunities
- Demand for walking and sports fields infrastructure
- Availability of close, low cost opportunities

“People are increasingly interested in non-structured recreation activities like mountain biking; tramping; bush walking which enables people to recreate at a time that suits them.”

“Some of the demand is currently met by private commercial forest. If access to these are ever lost; there will be considerable demand placed on the council to meet this demand”

“Some demand is being generated by facility provision i.e the TECT All Terrain park as a venue for activities such as mountain biking; horse riding; motor sports; shooting etc is increasing the awareness within the city to some extent for these activities as well as increasing opportunities for them to occur.”
Population groups and areas of demand growth

Populations
- Large range of people - no one group stands out, particularly in terms of age
- But many population groups identified, including
  - Families
  - Young people, 20-35, 40+ age groups
  - Maori, Pacific and NZ European
- May depend more on activities, e.g. high socioeconomic groups tend to demand road cycling

Demand growth
- Cycling (mentioned often)
- Walking / hiking / trail running
- Parks/Open space/bush/high amenity/nature
- Sports fields (for some codes)
- Unstructured activities
Qualitative themes from planner discussions

• Peri-urban activity providing a unique opportunity to interact with natural environment
• Competing demands for land use
• Accessibility, distance and lack of public transport seen as key issues
• Enablers include
  – Effective interagency approaches
  – Multi-user capabilities
  – Easy, informal and unstructured opportunities
• Biking, walking, tramping and coastal activities as areas of greatest demand
Waitakere-Taupaki

- Village-style rural atmosphere
- Self-sufficient and locally-focused
- Seen as “accessible” to many recreation options (all by car)
- Working the land, cycling, local sports clubs
- Recreational travel demands, particularly as children get older
- Key barriers were time, cost, safety (cycling) and transport
- Increased land use pressure – Auckland’s spread

“...my kids have had eggs hatching in their hand and they know how a sheep comes into this world. They’ve had the pet lambs and it’s a nice lifestyle to bring them up with.”

“There isn’t really anywhere to cycle out our way safely.”
Beachlands-Maraetai

- Rural and seaside; local recreation opportunities these afford
- Walking, cycling, local sports
- ‘Hyper-localisation’ of information
- Regional Park resource and activities
- Pool swimming facilities
- Tension in weekends and summer with visitor influx
- Traffic safety

“Well for me it was definitely the water, close to the water and the lifestyle that you get off the water, the sea.”

“You can go walking and half an hour walk takes about an hour or more because you are always running into someone and talk for 5 or 10 minutes.”
Rototuna

• Destination area for new families
• Quality of housing key attractor
• Seen as safe for children
• Walking, cycling, pavement scootering, local parks and gully tracks
• Substantial need for recreation travel owing to lack of amenities and facilities (including pools, halls, sports fields)
• Concerns re loss of recreation land to development and traffic safety

“One thing we really did like about this area was the safety for the children in terms of the cul de sacs and them being able to get out in their scooters and their bikes and things like that.”

“Very family friendly... after having the kids I really appreciate how easy it is to live here and how nice it is to be able to afford a really nice home.”

“The thing we miss the most are we’d love to have a pool out this way. We’d also love to have better hall facilities.”
Bethlehem

- Destination suburb, close to rural areas and harbour, schools and churches both well regarded
- Local opportunities at Carmichael Reserve, Tauriko Lakes, Wairoa River
- Vehicle travel for many recreational needs, particularly children
- Walking, cycling, swimming, offroad activities (TECT park)
- Traffic safety and disconnection in walking and cycle network
- Low awareness of information on local opportunities/activities

“...it’s a beautiful area I think especially where, well Bethlehem everywhere is but where we live is countrified but right next to the city.”

“the cycle tracks are that close but there’s just no connection ... without having, like a safe connection for the children.”

“That’s the other thing in Bethlehem is it needs to have like a soccer pitch or something the kids could kick the ball around.”
Remote experience
Trail remote
Natural
Roaded natural
Rural natural
Urban natural

Back country opportunities

Beachlands-Maraetai
Villages some distance from city; close access to regional parks, sea and countryside

Waitakere-Taupaki
City fringe; access to regional parks and countryside, rural lifestyles

Bethlehem
City fringe; landscaped open space opportunities, walkways/cycleways, natural environment of river and surrounds

Rototuna
City fringe and predominantly urban

Local opportunities
Coastal & rural/natural open spaces; Established centres with recreation infrastructure
Rural environment and access to open spaces
Rural and river access; Established and newly developed recreation spaces
Quiet streets for informal recreation Countryside access

Local challenges
Traffic safety Visitor influx affecting recreational enjoyment
Traffic safety Travel to recreational needs
Traffic safety Lack of connections in open space areas Information on opportunities/events
Traffic safety Lack of local recreational facilities and travel to recreational needs
Quality peri-urban experience: Key attributes

Attributes

- A natural experience that provides an escape from city living (e.g. forest, open space or coast)
- Good transport links and connections included public transport or walking/cycling access
- Quality walking and cycling opportunities ranging from easy well-formed paths to less formed trails
- Low cost or free access to recreation areas
- A ‘user-friendly’ experience considering access, signposting, appropriate facilities and family events...
- ...Alternatively a rugged, ‘getting away from it all’ experience (e.g. coast or forest where the natural geography allows
- A safe environment both in terms of road safety and personal security
- Multi-user and whole of family opportunities
Quality peri-urban experience: Key challenges

Growing population and competing demands for land use

Planning for recreational infrastructure in new peri-urban development areas

Funding/resources for developing and maintaining recreational facilities in constrained environment

Transport/mobility access to recreational opportunities

Safety and security

Leadership
The peri-urban experience

• As a ‘user-friendly’ easily accessible outdoor experience that allows city dwellers to utilise relatively close recreational opportunities and provide a connection with the outdoors.
  – Probably more important as a motivator, based on the likely utilisation of peri-urban recreation spaces.

• As a stepping stone for more adventurous activities further afield, by providing a supportive environment to test skills and physical ability.
  – Some evidence that peri-urban recreation also has the potential to extend peoples understanding and affiliation with nature and may also allow activity skills to be practiced in a manageable environment.
Conclusions

• Potential demand for types of experiences that peri-urban areas could provide
  – Need for clearer articulation of its nature and importance
  – Growing demand for cycling and challenges of infrastructure to support this
• Different forms of peri-urban and associated opportunities and challenges
• Different levels of need for facilities in these areas
• Awareness of peri-urban opportunities
• Exemplars of inter-agency approaches (e.g. Bay of Plenty)
• Competing land uses a key challenge
  – Balancing recreation, conservation and development
  – Recreation over-use of natural resources
• Transport access
• Safety and security
Potential research opportunities

- Further detailed case study analysis
- Needs of more diverse populations (e.g. Red Hill in Papakura)
- Intervention analysis
- Supporting infrastructure for peri-urban recreation