

Some of the Mayoral interventions at Tuesday's meeting of the Wellington Regional Council's Land Transport Committee (at which I wear the economic development special interest hat) reminded me that this is local body election year!

At the Chamber we spend considerable time monitoring, lobbying and cooperating with local bodies, nationally and in our region. While not as significant in function as State Governments in Australia or the United States, local government here plays a crucial role for our local and regional economies and touches every business and every member of society every day. Nationally, local government expenditure is worth roughly 4% of our GDP. And expenditure increased 55% in the period 2003/04 to 2008/09. In Wellington City the Council is forecast to spend \$343 million in 2010. \$115 million is going to come from businesses and \$126 million from non-business rate payers. In Wellington's CBD a 2007 property council study showed that the rates burden equates to \$26 per square meter.

These statistics alone should be making everyone sit up and take notice of what is going on. But wider developments make the 2010 local government elections even more important. The creation of the super city in Auckland poses increased challenges for local government in this region. Right now there is not that acute a difference in size and influence between the multiple governments in Auckland and a council such as Wellington city. But once the super city is formed there is a real risk that Wellington city will have to work even harder to compete for the attention of central government. We will require strong and effective leadership over the next three years to both ensure that the Wellington voice is listened to, and to help shape a new structure for local government in this region. The current configuration of nine councils for a population of 475,000 is frankly non-sustainable. Ideally, this new structure should be one of our own making, not something that is imposed by central government. Again this will require strong leadership.

Wellington is great at events. But the Rugby World Cup in 2011 is a much bigger challenge than we are used to. The number of visitors will be greater than the norm, the tournament longer and the national and international scrutiny will be greater. We literally cannot afford to drop the ball. And it would be a huge opportunity lost if we did not leverage this tournament to the short and long term advantage of business, and if we did not see a long term legacy flowing from the event. We will need the strong and effective leadership to meet this challenge too.

These wider developments make it all the more important that we have strong candidates standing for the mayoralty positions throughout our region, for the increasingly important Regional Council, and for our city councils. We also need the business community and general rate payers to take the forthcoming election seriously, and vote in this year's election for candidates that can provide the

leadership, as the cities in the region, and as a regional council we clearly need. The 39.76% turnout in 2007 was extremely disappointing.