

PARTNERSHIP A WINNING FORMULA

This Pathfinder project highlights the benefits of forging relationships in a spirit of partnership.

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The Northern Busway stations project on Auckland's North Shore included the construction of three bus stations, pedestrian bridges and associated car parking. Although NZ Strong was the main contractor for the client (North Shore City Council), Fletcher Engineering was employed by a different client (NZ Transport Agency) to construct the 6.24 km busway lanes, drainage and services, bridges and interchanges and prepare the three station building platforms. The result was a matrix of entities that were often not formally bound to each other. Hence a high degree of coordination and communication was needed for all to achieve their respective outcomes.

Before NZ Strong's involvement, the Opus, Beca, Connell Wagner team established structures to help oversee these potentially complicated relationships. For example, there was a formal requirement within the traditional

contracts to have monthly project control group meetings and 3-monthly project management board meetings, with key members represented. These meetings were invaluable for reviewing progress, making decisions, airing issues and being informed of the next stage of works.

A spirit of partnership

At the first management meeting for the busway stations contract, it was agreed that, although the contract was traditional, an informal partnering charter should be established between North Shore City Council, New Zealand Transport Agency, NZ Strong and Opus. NZ Strong was already an advocate for collaborative practice, so this was an easy step. The charter was the starting point, but the attitude people brought to the table – 'let's work together and find a solution' – made the difference. Both client and

architect helped in every way they could towards making the partnering concept work.

Contractor's actions proactive

NZ Strong's proactive approach started when they submitted an alternative methodology at tender. Their method ensured that they won by a \$1 million margin and it also reduced the number of motorway closures from 17 to 4. Both the cost savings and the minimal disruption to the transport network appealed to the client. NZ Strong's idea of using the gantry trolley rather than cranes (to facilitate the cladding, glazing and finishing of the motorway overhead bridge) was also a first in New Zealand.

Their commitment to collaboration was proven when a problem arose on day one. Rather than request a time extension, they had anticipated this potential risk and organised a back-up plan that was initiated with the client's agreement. According to North Shore City Council's Peter Everett, 'NZ Strong went a long way towards setting the tone by how they operated when they encountered difficulties. There are always issues that come up, but it is how you deal with them – they came in with a real partnership attitude.'

NZ Strong introduced other collaborative practices, such as the 'grey ledger' – an informal variation management tool that offsets all the little potential variations against value management ideas. Shane Brealey, NZ Strong's project manager, says the grey ledger works by trying to have the tender cost the finished cost. 'We bring to the table the alliancing-type attributes of swings and roundabouts – offsetting costs with other good ideas that make savings.' Opus's Muir Coup said that they hadn't worked that way before, 'but it saved on some of the paper war and on quantity surveyors' time'. Peter Everett agreed that the grey ledger worked and they would use it again with the right contractor.



Completed Akoranga Station for the Northern Busway.

Maintaining a collaborative culture

Both the project management board and project control group upheld the principles behind the informal charter. This sent a strong message down the line. The collaborative message was supported by the high level of reporting, seen as key to the culture operating in an open and honest manner. The clear reporting drove all the site meetings and outlined all the information required to build the project. Everyone involved received the reports, so there were no surprises and a healthy culture was maintained.

The project team was willing to acknowledge their mistakes and work together to solve any problems. Open discussion was part of the philosophy, and the contractor was keen to keep the quality of work high. Where some trades did not initially meet the standard required, they kept on until the workmanship was right.

By the end of the project, there was a strong level of trust and accounts were resolved quickly.

Contractors' strong coordination

The three busway stations were located inside Fletcher Engineering's work area. Part of Fletcher's responsibility was to prepare the building platforms and supply services to a certain location. To help coordinate their programmes, Fletchers and NZ Strong worked together on the front-end planning and put structures in place early, including weekly meetings throughout the duration of the project to cover things like environmental, health and safety and programming issues.

The project's collaborative nature, with its emphasis on relationships, resulted in it being built on time, to budget and to a high quality. Within a month of practical completion, the team were awarded the Code Compliance Certificate. Final accounts were resolved within 6 weeks (including the Christmas break).

By taking a global view that they were all in it together, the project teams achieved a positive outcome. As a result, there is on-going work for the contractors with North Shore City Council.

A more detailed report is available at www.constructing.co.nz, see Pathfinder projects.



Gantry trolley on 120 m bridge over SH1 Motorway.

Project	Akoranga, Smales Farm and Sunnynook Stations, Northern Busway
Project steering committee	North Shore City Council and New Zealand Transport Agency
Lead client	North Shore City Council (Peter Everett)
Architect	Jasmax (initial preliminary design), Opus International Consultants (detailed design and contract management), Mike Green (project architect design phase), Neville Clarke (project architect construction phase)
Contractor	NZ Strong (Shane Brealey project manager)
Structural engineers	Opus International Consultants and Muir Coup (engineer to contract)
Civil engineers	Opus International Consultants (Akoranga Station), Connell Wagner (Westlake and Sunnynook Stations)
Region	Auckland
Sector	Public amenities
Final contract value	\$13.6 million
Resource consent granted	May 2002
Development of design	2004–06
Tender	4-way competitive
Contractor selected	December 2006
Construction timescale	19 March–17 December 2007
Official opening	2 February 2008
Form of contract	NZS 3910 with special conditions