

## **Christchurch Story Op Ed**

Opinion: **Christchurch, A City with Opportunity**

Malcolm Johns, CEO Christchurch Airport

Since arriving with my family two and half years ago I've enjoyed many conversations, both private and professional, about where our city's at and what Christchurch should be in the future.

For me, cities have three basic dimensions - people, place, and the things that connect the two. The latter is largely emotive in nature, but physically anchored and intangible in value. Nonetheless, it's critical because strong connections generate pride, ambition and confidence in a city.

All three dimensions were naturally impacted at an individual and collective level by the events of 2010/11. Christchurch's place was clearly altered and what's replacing it is not the same as what was lost. There is understandable grief for that, however this appears balanced with optimism about what is being created.

This transition is natural and occurs on an intensely personal timeline. It also helps us understand some of the research findings the Canterbury Development Corporation noted recently, where those who've arrived since the quakes have a more positive view of the city than those who were resident before.

This transition has been clear in the conversations I've been part of over the past couple of years and reflects the different stages participants are in their transition at any given point in time. The leadership challenge of our time is how we help each other, our communities and our city positively through this transition. How we make the city's old heart beat inside its new skin.

However, what's also evident to me is that most people remain deeply attached to our city. People have told me what they love about Christchurch, what's drawn them here, what's kept them here, and what they see as the values that need to be preserved and the ambitions they have for Christchurch.

I've also noted there is more in common than not. Unfortunately, public conversations often focus on the differences, which exist largely at the margins. What's in common is actually the most important part to the Christchurch story,

because it's the connector, the part everyone believes in, is bound by, and it is essential to us holding onto the lovely old while allowing the new to arrive.

The team at the airport is passionate about being positive champions of our city's story, so we initiated some research to capture that big piece of commonality we've been hearing. To capture the views of the broadest range of people we could we revisited the 'Share an Idea' campaign, other recent research, and completed a series of one-on-one interviews with about 50 committed residents, leaders and external stakeholders. Not to create Christchurch Airport's view, but to capture the city's.

We didn't want a nifty advertising slogan. We wanted to capture the essence of what people see as the Christchurch Story, what people believe the city should be famous for.

Most people around the world live in cities for work, but all too often these places leave people feeling trapped, unable to live life on their own terms and disconnected from their communities. Traffic; lack of transport alternatives; legacy infrastructure; inadequate stadia and facilities; restricted education choices; poor access to health care; unaffordable housing and time-poor families, are all cited as unattractive contributions to life in big cities.

These are the 'hygiene factors' in any city's story. Getting them wrong drives dissatisfaction, which can come to dominate the city's story. Getting them right is critical but unfortunately only creates a neutral position i.e. nobody loves a city because it has a new sewage system, but without one people would be unhappy.

The things that drive real satisfaction - the motivators (or attractors) - are what we want front and centre of a city story. These are the things that make us want to stay in, or move to, a city. Participants in our research believe that for Christchurch a key motivator was opportunity - growing minds, careers, families, communities, creativity, innovation and businesses. They also want these to be connected globally, especially in science, education, sports and business.

There is a strong sense we're not looking for a brand new Christchurch story, just clarity on how we craft the next chapter in the one we've been writing for generations.

Participants see a future Christchurch that aligns closely with core Kiwi values, offering opportunities for meaningful work (often internationally connected), quality education at all levels, affordable housing, strong communities and a vibrant creative, sporting and social scene. They want what we do here to be meaningful nationally and internationally, with an ability to try new things, to collaborate, to innovate with practical and ingenious solutions. They want big city opportunities, without big city stresses – thriving not just surviving!

They see Christchurch as a city with opportunity: to grow, to connect and to find balance. They see Christchurch as the best place in the world, to be a Kiwi, to live the Kiwi dream!

To make this happen we need to set the ambition, have the confidence to relentlessly pursue it and see the broad leadership flying in formation to enable it. Christchurch has done this before, with an ambitious goal of entering the new millennium with a bang, the leadership harnessed ambition, showed confidence in our communities and backed it by building the Art Gallery, Horncastle Arena, Convention Centre, and an expanded Lancaster Park.

It's time to channel that spirit once more!

Peter Young has brought this research to life in a short video at [www.christchurchstory.co.nz](http://www.christchurchstory.co.nz) Please watch, share, use, discuss and debate this and the other material available.