

EMERGING TALENT MEMBERS IN FOCUS



The Emerging Talent Network has been established by Infrastructure New Zealand to develop the next generation of infrastructure leaders. In this changing COVID-19 landscape we will be profiling a different ET member working in a different part of the industry each week. If you would like to be profiled, or would like to nominate someone to be profiled, please answer the questions below and send your picture through to [Tara](#).

We would like to introduce Alex Saifiti from Auckland Transport as this week's Emerging Talent Member in Focus. In addition to his role at Auckland Transport, Alex also sits on the ET Auckland Committee.



ALEX SAIFITI
PROPERTY ADVISOR



1. What organisation are you with, and what do you do day-to-day (normally)?

I am a Property Advisor at Auckland Transport (AT). AT is a council-controlled organisation (CCO) that is responsible for all of the region's transport services (excluding state highways) from roads and footpaths to cycling, parking and public transport. My team, Property Acquisitions, is responsible for obtaining the property rights needed to give AT the ability to shape its strategic programme and deliver its capital programme. In this role, I provide professional in-house property advice and input into property acquisition, disposal and other technical services. On a day-to-day basis, I may be providing property cost input into strategic plans, negotiating with landowners under the Public Works Act 1981 (PWA) and much more. I enjoy my work because it is interesting, challenging and provides positive and tangible outcomes for the people of Tāmaki Makaurau.

2. How has your work changed since going into lockdown?

In my role, I interact with surveyors, valuers and lawyers and engage and negotiate with landowners. The inability to engage kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) has been a challenge, but the use of tools like Microsoft Teams has enabled me to maintain a new kind of "business as usual." I am continuing to work on a wide range of projects which are, at this stage, still able to maintain a similar pace as pre-lockdown. During the lockdown, I have become more reliant on business tools like Google Maps and GIS, but there is nothing like physically seeing a site to understand its nature, constraints and wider project impacts. I look forward to more site visits as we progress to level 1, although I think some of the ways of working during lockdown are worth keeping as we return to normal.

3. What are the biggest successes/challenges with the new ways of working? (i.e., video conferencing, lack of events and in-person meetings, etc.)

As a team, we have continued to produce quality outputs and maintain effective communication. Being able to connect with team members in a more personal setting and understanding each other's routine has helped to ensure productive conversations and tangible outputs. As we have shifted to working remotely, there has been a notable increase in the use

of Zoom and Microsoft Team meetings and some have experienced the challenge of, what has been termed “Zoom Fatigue”. It’s really important to build in breaks and not always default to video calls. Ask yourself, could an email or phone call be just as effective?

4. How is your sector of the infrastructure industry going and what are your sector’s biggest needs right now?

Like a lot of industries, local government is feeling the pinch right now. To some extent, it is caught between a rock and a hard place, where any increase in rates would impact an already fine balance between ratepayers’ service expectations and their willingness to pay for those services, yet any reduced revenue has the potential to jeopardise pivotal pieces of infrastructure that service those same ratepayers and future generations. As a CCO, AT is facing uncertainty in funding. AT receives around a third of its funding from Auckland Council, a third from the NZ Transport Agency and a portion from public transport, parking and infringements. All forms of revenue streams have been impacted by COVID-19. Like many other local government agencies, AT is cautiously progressing with existing projects, monitoring its balance sheet and listening to plans from Council and Central Government.

5. What changes to your work or sector will endure after the lockdown is lifted?

With significant projects underway and in pre-implementation, Property Acquisitions and AT’s Planning team play a pivotal role in ensuring tomorrow’s projects are shovel ready. It continues to progress despite the macro-level infrastructure conversations and decisions taking place around it. I look forward to seeing how the changes to the Resource Management Act and any potential PWA reforms will impact my day to day work.

I am lucky enough to work for an organisation which has provided open and honest lines of communication through all levels of management during the lockdown. AT’s CEO, Shane Ellison, has provided webinar updates to over 1,500 staff. These webinars have been great opportunities to discuss our current and future state and AT’s COVID response while acknowledging that we live in uncertain times. I look forward to seeing more of these updates as we continue to move forward requiring whanaungatanga (strong relationships through shared experiences) more than ever.

6. What are your top tips and tricks for surviving and thriving in the COVID-lockdown landscape?

My top tips for surviving lockdown are as follows:

- Cut the COVID Coverage – limit what you read and listen to.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Take lockdown as an opportunity to reassess and prioritise what matters to you.
- Learn something new – start that side-hustle you’ve always wanted to.
- Make time to look after your health and wellbeing.

To learn more about opportunities for a career with Auckland Transport click [here](#) or you can connect with Alex on [LinkedIn](#).

LEARNING IN LOCKDOWN

In this period of change and uncertainty, we have an opportunity to invest in ourselves, learn, and prepare for the new normal. Each week we will round up the webinars and resources we’ve come across that will be of interest to our members. If you would like to recommend a webinar to be included in next week’s profile, please contact [Tara](#).

Tuesday 19 May 2020, 10.30AM | [Connecting our Data: The Value of a Digital Twin for New Zealand's Infrastructure](#)

Tuesday 19 May 2020, 11:00AM | [Project Connect- Leadership in a Virtual Landscape](#)

Wednesday 20 May 2020, 5:00PM | [Housing the Future with Minister Woods and Andrew McKenzie](#)

Thursday, 21 May 2020, 1:00PM | [Transitioning to a Productive, Equitable and Sustainable Economy with Minister James Shaw](#)

Friday 29 May 2020, 11:00AM | [Flint CxObytes with Charlotte Walshe, CEO of Jade Software Corporation](#)

Emerging Talent Network



JOIN US ON LINKEDIN