On Central City Speed Limits

Submission of the Wellington City Youth Council

Contact: Jack Marshall, Youth Council Chairperson
jackmarshallnz@gmail.com

Oral Submission: The Wellington City Youth Council would also like to make an oral submission.

Please contact Jack Marshall, Chair of Wellington City Youth Council on 021 186 6186 or jackmarshallnz@gmail.com to confirm details.

About: The Wellington City Youth Council is an advisory body to the Wellington City Council, meeting fortnightly to discuss youth-related issues and projects in the city.

The Youth Council represents members of Wellington City youth between the ages of 12 and 24, providing young perspectives on Wellington City Council proposals and draft strategies, as well as encouraging young people to engage in local governance.

[1] Our vision is of a city designed for people, not vehicles. This means prioritising pedestrian needs in, and usage of, the inner city area.

[2] The Youth Council has previously submitted on the Public Transport Spine Study in favour of a more pedestrian-friendly CBD with public transport corridors. We confirm our continued commitment to that statement.

[3] Accordingly, the Youth Council supports lowering the central city speed limits, as a part of a wider strategy to make the CBD more people-friendly.

[4] Pedestrians often cross against signals because it is convenient. This convenience contributes to the urban vibrancy of the Wellington CBD. The Youth Council wishes to see transport planning take this into account, as it clearly signals public opinion on how the CBD should be used.

[5] The Youth Council would like to highlight two specific pedestrian-friendly initiatives. Firstly, the Lower Cuba Street shared space signifies a pro-pedestrian approach that we believe should be replicated in other areas of the CBD. Some potential areas for shared spaces include, for example, Upper Cuba Street, and/or Dixon Street from Victoria Street to Tory Street.

[6] The second pedestrian-friendly initiative the Youth Council would like to highlight is that of timed pedestrian signals. Councillors may be aware that downtown Auckland pedestrian crossings have large orange countdowns which show how much time the
crossing signal will remain green, and then how long it will flash red. The Youth Council believes that this enhances safety by informing people exactly how long they have until vehicle signals change. As such, it is a relatively low-cost proposal which improves the ability of pedestrians to gauge risk and timing of their road crossings at intersections.

[7] The main effect of reduced speed limits will be to reduce the actual speed of travel. We do not believe current speed limits are accurately followed by some motorists, but a reduction in speed limits will result in actual travel speed reductions for these motorists irrespective of whether they adhere to the new limits. For the majority of law-abiding drivers, the risk posed to pedestrians will be further reduced; this is surely positive.

[8] In particular, buses pose an increased risk because of their high weight relative to other vehicles. Reducing speeds in the CBD will contribute to increased pedestrian safety because of the decrease of the force transmitted in collisions by a factor greater than the actual speed reduction. This corresponds with larger reductions in probable accident lethality. In layman’s terms, the slower you go the smaller the mess. Hence, it makes sense to cut speeds so that should an accident occur, it is less likely to result in a fatality or serious injury.

[9] Given the frequency of bus stops, traffic lights, and current levels of congestion within the proposed zone during peak hours, we do not view a reduction in speed limit as limiting the effectiveness of public transport capacity. Given this, and the limited area of the speed reductions, we do not consider any substantial ‘economic cost’ argument as being applicable to these general circumstances. To the small extent there may be an economic impact, we believe this is more than offset by the decrease in accident lethality. The effects of transport velocity on accident lethality are included in an appendix.

[10] Finally, all specific individual accidents are avoidable. By contrast, accidents in aggregate are inevitable. Every accident for which the general circumstances are foreseeable but is not prevented by planners, in our view, becomes the responsibility of those planners. We ask the Council to bear that residual responsibility in mind when considering its decision. We do not consider this added responsibility as taking away from personal responsibility of pedestrians or motorists; rather, this responsibility obligates Council to act in a way that minimises harm.