

October 2016



Polhill consultation on new tracks

Brooklyn Trail Builders (BTB) is a community volunteer group that has been building and maintaining trails, planting trees, and removing rubbish in Polhill for the past decade. BTB has won a variety of awards, the most recent being the 2016 Wellington Community Award for Sport and Leisure.

The 15 kilometres of hand-built trails in Polhill and Hawkins Hill are some of the most popular trails in Wellington. The Polhill trails are also used by the Polhill Restoration group, who have set up a pest control network to protect the spill-over of rare birds from Zealandia next door. Due to its close proximity to the city centre, walkers, runners, commuters, mountainbikers and bird watchers use these trails extensively.

BTB thinks it's great the trails are so popular with a variety of users. We love seeing walkers and runners as well as mountain bikers using these trails, but this also means the traffic has increased to a point where trail user experience and enjoyment – the reason people go into the green hills of Wellington – is being seriously affected.

We believe the existing trail network cannot sustain the current (and ever-growing) numbers of users, and action is required to mitigate the current issues. This need was illustrated by the number of submissions highlighting concerns about how busy the area is to Wellington City Council (WCC) in the recent Open Spaces Access Plan.

BTB proposes three trails to improve user experience and safety in Polhill.

1. A mountainbike priority descending trail, 2.5 kilometres in length. Grade intermediate. (Purple solid line on map).
2. A foot traffic only connection from Karepa St to Planet Ride trail - Planet Ride is a walking only trail. (Blue solid line on map).
3. A two-way multi-user 350m connector trail from near the top of Clinical, connecting to Highbury Fling. (Red solid line on map).

These proposals are described in more detail below. BTB has no additional trail proposals for this area for the next five-ten years.

1. Build a mountainbike priority descending trail, 2.5 kilometres in length.

Graded intermediate, it descends from the Fence line 4WD track to the lower Transient trail. Description: Descending from the Fence line 4WD track (near pylon) to Transient trail (near pylon above Durham St). The trail will be intermediate-grade, incorporating 'flow' so it is a fun experience to ensure it becomes the preferred descending route. It will also incorporate occasional very short 'alternative' or harder lines which will suit more advanced riders and again make them want to descend this new trail rather than Transient.

Why is it needed?

This would remove descending mountainbikers from the upper two thirds of Transient trail, thereby reducing congestion and improving the experience for both directions for walkers and runners and uphill mountainbikers.

Issue/ Opportunity	Commentary	Mitigation
a. Volume of use	Total usage is about 100,000 pa on Transient with a 50/50 split between cyclist/non cyclist. Users trips are generally interrupted so enjoyment of trails/environment is compromised.	Provide additional trail to reduce volume of usage on Transient.
b. User conflict	The electronic counter show that most cyclists are descending, while non-cyclists are ascending. This gives the most potential for conflict, especially on some of the blind corners.	Provide a separate descending trail to reduce conflict and improve enjoyment for all users.
c. MTB descending expectation	There is already a mountainbike priority descending trail above Transient in Te Kopahou Reserve (Carparts trail). There's also another mountainbike priority descending trail for the lower 1km of Transient (Serendipity trail). The proposed new trail would provide continuity of riding experience between these. Currently mountainbikers move between priority and shared use trails which is confusing, and lessens the user's experience.	Provide a continuous priority mountain bike trail so rider (and non-rider) expectation is consistent.
d. Shared trail principle	BTB generally agree with the principle of shared trail use. However, the very high user numbers on Transient compromises the experience of all users and hence, is no longer a valid design model.	The model of having two parallel, 'paired trails', with one for ascending and another for descending, is a model that already works well in this area (the Windmill and Carparts trails in Te Kopahou, and Serendipity and lower Transient in Polhill). Paired trails start and finish at the same point, so no user group is excluded from the area but removes the fastest

		traffic from slower users.
e. Trail closure for events	Users are excluded when events are being held, e.g. running or mountain biking events close trails.	Building paired trails means Polhill can remain more accessible during events.
f. Future trails further south, e.g. Te Kopahou	BTB is keen to work with WCC to develop trails further south (subject to master planning and consultation). Polhill is the obvious 'gateway' to the South Coast and needs a complete trail network to meet future demand. The envisaged new trails could complete a 42 kilometre loop from Aro St, which would allow walkers, runners and mountainbikers into areas of Te Kopahou currently inaccessible to them. It would also allow access for tree planting, pest control and be a tourist drawcard.	Complete the trail network with paired trails that provides the foundation to meet future demand.
g. Flora impact	The trail will require the removal of some trees and the benching of a narrow trail. Bush is regenerating from farmland and currently has limited diversity with low ecological value, and the first part of the trail descends through large areas of weeds.	Longer term, the trails will improve the flora of Polhill and will provide access to previously inaccessible areas for planting native trees. BTB will maintain all trails and remove weeds. All waterways will be protected from debris or sediment.
h. Fauna impact	Additional trail will negatively impact on birds etc.	Trails have allowed for closer identification and monitoring of rare birds, which often nest in very steep bush. No studies have been carried out but saddleback have chosen to nest next to trails with chicks successfully fledged. With the trails providing access to place traps and plant trees, on balance, we think the environmental impact is acceptable.
i. Cost	Concern that an additional trail will be a drain on ratepayers.	The trail will be built by volunteers and BTB is prepared to build and maintain this trail at no cost to WCC. If WCC wish to contribute to costs, then this can be discussed.
j. Safety	What about where the descending trail crosses other tracks? Can trails be made safer?	Design features at trail intersections, including good sight lines, will reduce speed and ensure safety of users. At trail exit onto 4WD (near Durham St) a 30m section of trail will be built to separate uphill and downhill traffic where it crosses a blind dip.
k. Impact on residential areas	How will the new mountain bike trail impact on residents in this area	The exit of this trail onto the 4WD Transient ensures there is no change to overall rider flow and use in Polhill. Accordingly, residents in this area will

		be unaffected.
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- Once the proposed priority descending trail is completed, BTB envisages very little descending mountainbike use on upper Transient.
- Mountainbikers accessing the trail network and descending from Karepa St will still need to ride down Transient until they reach Serendipity.
- The lower one kilometre of Transient will still be used by beginner and some intermediate mountainbikers as the corresponding parallel priority downhill trail, Serendipity, has four short sections of advanced riding.

Currently Transient has an electronic counter. If this trail is consented and built, BTB asks WCC to install a corresponding electronic counter towards the bottom of it. It, along with the counter on Transient, will give invaluable information on user type, direction and numbers and the changes that have occurred. This information may then be used to help other busy trail areas meet their increased usage in the future.

2. Foot traffic only connector trail

Description: A 350m connector from 104 Karepa St to Planet Ride walking trail.

Why is it needed? This will provide another entry to Polhill Reserve and a link with existing suburban Brooklyn walking routes. It would connect with the existing Planet Ride walking track to provide a seamless foot traffic only route through the middle of Polhill, connecting upper Brooklyn with Aro St. It will then be possible for walkers and runners to ascend and descend Polhill and only encounter mountainbikers at trail intersections.

This proposed trail passes very close to houses near the road. Consultation re privacy or other screening may be needed between WCC land and house owners. Costs incurred by WCC in building this track include retaining in two areas and gravelling. BTB will build the rest of the trail by hand.

BTB proposes that the name of the trail Planet Ride be changed. It is also known as Backdoor but BTB suggests that Planet Walk might work.

3. Shared use connector trail

Description: A 350m connector from upper Clinical trail to Highbury Fling trail (both shared use trails) that 'by-passes' George Denton playground.

Why is it needed? At present, trail users climbing the top of the Clinical trail to George Denton Park face a steep, increasingly rutted pinch climb just before the playground. If they then re-enter Polhill they have to cross a public road for another pinch climb, leading up to Highbury Fling. These climbs are inconsistently steep, compared with the gradients of Clinical and Highbury Fling trails. Users also need to avoid traffic on the end of Highbury Road and any fast travelling cyclists descending the Rollercoaster trail. Way finding through the playground is challenging. A new connector removes the above issues while still maintaining the current circular route around the Reserve.

No costs to WCC. Built through areas of regenerating bush.

Build philosophy (for WCC and may not be needed in public consultation document)

The trails will be built following the principles of International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA), which has at its core an emphasis on minimising trail construction in a natural environment. IMBA's philosophy includes working with the natural environment, with the trail moving above and under large trees and other natural 'anchors.' It is for this reason that BTB hand build trails and use as much rock dug from the slope as possible to naturally 'armour' the trail.

The biggest risk to a trail is erosion by water and we will incorporate IMBA's ideas of a low overall grade of descent, outslope and regular grade reversals to quickly remove water from the trail surface.

Track Assessment (for WCC and may not be needed in public consultation document)

It was suggested in the meeting with WCC to discuss this project that we look at the Track Assessment as outlined in WCC's Open Spaces Access Plan. Hence it is included and out response is bolded.

5.4 Track assessment • Shared-use tracks are preferred within the open space network to optimise usage rates. However, where there are safety issues or major conflict between users, for example fast bikes and walkers and /or runners, tracks may be prioritised for certain activities.

BTB believes the proposed priority mountainbike descending trail is needed to improve safety and mitigate conflict. We wish it to be one direction only, with a sign at the bottom forbidding all uphill traffic.

• In considering the suitability of developing a new track or changing the use of existing tracks, the following criteria will be taken into account.

Environmental impact – tracks must be well planned and maintained, taking into consideration priorities and actions to protect and restore biodiversity in accordance with Our Natural Capital. For tracks in ecologically significant sites, there are important design considerations that need to be taken into account.

Rare birdlife is spreading into Polhill from the nearby Zealandia Sanctuary. These birds are spreading into regenerating bush, into an area that already has trails built. We believe our trail building techniques (narrow and hand built) will mitigate any adverse effects and our planting of trees and removal of weeds will improve the habitat and biodiversity of this area in the long-term.

- Protect prime bush remnants – **There are no prime bush remnants in Polhill.**
- Protect significant trees – **Polhill is dominated by mahoe, a tree that is essential for regeneration but not a tree of final bush maturity. Trees of 'note' will be avoided, these include rewarewa and other important regenerating trees. The most common tree to be removed is mahoe, karo and pittosporum.**

- Keep track development at an appropriate distance from the stream channel to avoid negative impacts, for example through sedimentation. **One stream will be crossed and barricades will be erected to stop debris from trail building entering stream. The trail alignment will also meet and leave the stream area as soon as able, keeping in mind trail gradient.**

- Keep the tree canopy intact and not create canopy gaps – this can be accomplished through good track design. **Trail will be hand built and a narrow intermediate trail. This means most large trees, close to the trail, will be kept. The trail has to "work" for descending mountain bikers, ie, it has to have flow and hence trees that impede this will be removed.**

- Ensure that soil disturbance is minimised. Regardless of whether a site is ecologically significant, any track development should minimise disruption to the natural environment. **Trail will be hand built and broadcasting of dirt away from the trail will occur. This ensures no piles of dirt on the outside of trail that can encourage weed growth. When passing over large trees, wooden retaining will be used in appropriate places to raise the trail height, hence leaving more large roots undisturbed and removing less soil. The resulting 'bump' not only protects the trees but is a feature liked by mountainbikers. Cut trees will also be removed from the trail side.**

Draft Open Space Access plan 2016 13 - User group conflict – A track is unsuitable for shared use when conflict between users can't be mitigated. - Public safety – Speed of travel must be controlled for safe, shared use of tracks. For example, bike speeds may be slowed using track construction methods such as tight corners, or "switchbacks", and reverse gradient designs. **As discussed above, the proposed trail is as a result of these factors.**

The second proposal, a connector from Kerapa St to Planet Ride trail is also a response to trail conflict and user experience. It allows for a foot traffic only route from the bottom to the top of Polhill.

5.5 Walking, running and mountain biking/cycling Tracks are open to walkers, runners and mountain bikers/cyclists unless declared closed for a specific purpose in accordance with this policy. The Council intends that use of the majority of tracks is shared between bikers, walkers and runners. In particular, easy mountain bike tracks and connector tracks are well suited as shared-use tracks. Opportunities to increase the number of these tracks may be investigated as new initiatives through the draft annual plan process. **The third trail proposal, a connection between upper Clinical trail and Highbury Fling trail, fulfils this approach.**

Users groups

Friends of Town Belt
Wellington Mountain Bike Club
Makara Peak Supporters
Dirt Merchants
Wellington Marathon Clinic
Wellington Harriers
Brooklyn Residents Assoc

Highbury Residents
Aro Valley Residents
Waimapihi Restoration Group
Polhill Protectors Group
Active to Brooklyn (A2B)
Adjoining residents (only that are close to the 104 Karepa entry)
Wellington Trails Trust
Welly MTB Facebook forum
Garage Project
Wellington Runner's Meetup Group
Revolve
WORD -Wellington off road Department
Brooklyn School
Port Nicholson Ponake Cycle Club

'Misinformation' about the trails we are proposing to build has occurred in social media. Some FAQ's that may be considered.

Will this new mountainbike track be detrimental to walkers and other users in Polhill?

The purpose of this trail is to remove descending mountain bikers from Transient, a very busy trail, thereby improving the experience for walkers, runners and commuters in both directions and for uphill mountainbikers.

Is this a new type of downhill and fast trail for mountainbikers in Polhill?

No. It is designed to complement the trails that already exist in Polhill, it will be of intermediate grade, narrow and twisty, and designed to control bike rider speed.

Are mountainbikers trying to turn Polhill into a mountainbike park?

No. Brooklyn Trial Builders are a trail building group, we want walkers and runners to use the trails as much as mountainbikers. The second proposal for a foot traffic only trail to access the area, is proof of this.

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Brooklyn Trail Builders