

Oral Submissions on Trails Wellington Track Proposal for Mount Victoria: 24th of March 2022

This paper is a summary of the oral submissions to the Wellington City Council Community Hearings Panel on the 24th of March 2022.

In total there were 9 oral submissions, including 3 written statements read out by the chair. 4 submissions were for the Track Proposal and 5 were against.

In Opposition

The arguments raised against the proposal were centred around 4 themes, damage to the natural environment, tensions between mountain bikers and pedestrians, concerns from the residents around noise and visual disturbance and inconsistency with council policies and plans.

Natural environment

- Submitters were concerned that the new trail would open up the once untouched forested section of the eastern side of the Mount Victoria ridge to the sort of damage that has been caused on the other side of the mountain. They stated mountain biking is not a minimal environmental impact activity and that the western side has been destroyed by mountain bikers.
- They were concerned that mountain bikers don't choose to stick to the official trails but instead carve their own steep downhill trails once a new official trail opens, and that guerrilla track builders are not to be trusted when it comes to protecting the environment.
- They raised that the area has a nice bit of regenerating bush that was planted by Forest & Bird in the 1990s.

Tensions with pedestrians

- Submitters were concerned that the balance between mountain bike users and walking users is tipped too far against the needs of pedestrians in Matairangi already and this track will just contribute further to this.
- They raised that actual and perceived risk of injury discourages pedestrians (especially older pedestrians) from using the walking and shared tracks. That 'accessible to all' means that people with disabilities and with walking difficulties should be able to use the tracks of Mount Victoria without worrying whether they are going to be hit by a fast-moving mountain bike.
- As the track crosses lots of walking paths it would increase the risk that fast-moving mountain bikers pose to slower moving pedestrians. That despite some mountain bikers being well behaved, not all of them are.
- A likely outcome of this trail being built would be a further increase in the number of mountain bike users throughout Matairangi and therefore further risks to walkers and the environment. Therefore, the argument that there will be a reduction in the number of people riding the trail on the city side – is not necessarily true as there may just be more mountain bikers.
- Signage on Matairangi already indicates you can't walk in some places.
- Parks should be open for a wider group of people, not just mountain bikers, which is a male-dominated sport. We need to support diversity of access, people with disability, families etc.
- 90% of people are up there on foot.
- A submitter said all intersections should use fencing and other design measures to ensure that mountain bike users slow and only cross at one clearly signalled point. Likewise, walkers should be notified of a crossing

- A submitter also requested that user behaviour training should be incorporated to modify poor behaviour of mountain bikers and to reduce the risk to pedestrians.

Local residents' concerns

- Nearby resident submitters asked to move the proposed entrance, as there is a concern from the residents that the entry point to the track is too close to residential housing. They suggested moving the entrance to where it will not disturb residents. They were concerned with:
 - Noise associated with the use of the track – they raised that the area acts as a natural amphitheatre. Residents have chosen to live in a peaceful environment.
 - Visual disruption to the outlook of homes and particularly visual disruption from night riding. A submitter raised that mountain bike lights can have lumen ranges from 1500 to 8000 lumen which is more powerful than a car. And that there are operators in Wellington that specialise in night riding, and this could be something that happens here.
 - Increased traffic and reduced parking - residents are struggling with parking, if users take up the carparking, then may need to implement resident only parking.

Inconsistent with councils plans and policies

- A submitter suggested that the proposal isn't consistent with councils' plans and policies in places and therefore the council should review all these plans and policies for public consultation before making this decision. The plans and policies being: the Open Access Plan and the Matairangi Master Plan.
- Submitters raised that the Open Space Access Plan prefers shared paths and that all tracks will be shared by walkers and cyclists wherever this is appropriate. They said the new trail should be designated a shared path as per councils' strategies and not a mountain bike priority path
- They raised that the proposal is inconsistent with the principle of the Wellington Town Belt Act - to protect healthy indigenous ecosystems.

In support:

There were many points raised in support of the submissions and some points raised to make the track even better. A summary of these points are below:

Accessibility and Intermediate level trail

- Submitters said the proposed flow trail fills a gap in Wellington's trail network, particularly the Matairangi trail network which currently doesn't cater for beginners. The current track network are hard and difficult trails. This track at an intermediate level could cater for all ages and can provide young and old with a gateway into mountain biking, the outdoors and conservation.
- It was also raised that it could make mountain biking more accessible for women. There are rarely women seen mountain biking currently on Mount Victoria and therefore providing a more accessible trail is a gender inclusive / equity issue. Some submitters suggested bringing more women into mountain biking had a positive impact on the overall culture of the mountain biking sport.
- The submitters raised that the track would ease congestion on the city side trails.

Trail location

- Submitters identified the benefits of the trails network location. They said the trail is going to serve as a great commuting route for the eastern suburbs.
- Provide a good location for eastern suburb mountain bikers.
- It will be close to the CBD so will allow close mountain bike access during the workday and after work.
- They said that not all our users can drive to Makara Peak, especially kids.

Environment

- The submitters suggested that the track had the opportunity to improve the environment. That it will allow the area to become accessible for environmental groups for trapping and planting. And, in particular, their groups (including kids) do lots of trail maintenance.
- They raised that the kaitiakitanga and work that is happening in Makara and Waimapihi is testament that mountain bikers are committed to this and testament that ecological values in these areas can be raised with the support of trails groups.

Wider benefits

- The submitters said that this mountain biking track could be a flagship track, that could provide important health and wellbeing, environmental and economic benefits to Wellington. That the track could help give Wellington a competitive advantage, as a city where you can easily access nature so close to the city.


Trails Wellington responding to issues.

- Trails Wellington raised that they were responding to the issues raised by other submitters in changes to the track alignment, and were working with Council Officers. In particular, they said they had made steps to reduce potential trail conflict tensions between mountain bikers and walkers, were working on multiple ecological assessments and had changed the finish location.
- In addition, they were working to improve the management of the existing western trails which will result in all trail users feeling safer in this area. They said, in general they are spending a lot of time, effort, and money into managing and improving all crossings and mergers in other parts of the track network.
- They said they do not condone guerrilla trail building, and that they have amazing groups like WORD that are instilling values in our next generation around the protection of the environment. They also said Matairangi trail builders are just starting, but they have 30-40 volunteers each weekend doing trail maintenance, weeding, and planting.

More accessible

- Submitters raised that there was no truly accessible mountain bike track in Wellington. That this may be a step in the right direction but did not go far enough. A submitter said that since moving from Rotorua there was no appropriate trail for her to ride as a disabled rider. She said a lot of people in the disabled community would love to be able to participate.
- They said that the existing beginner trails in Wellington require you to already have an ability to ride - and the biggest factor of this is the width of the trails as it affects people's confidence. The point was made that if there is more room on the trail then there is more room for error. This track would not be wide enough.

DATED this day Monday 4 April 2022


Jill Day (Apr 4, 2022 13:02 GMT+12)

Councillor Jill Day

Chair – Community Hearings Panel

