

Submission from Wellington City Council: proposed improvements to the inner-city transport network

DRAFT ONLY

Submission to: **New Zealand Transport Agency**

Plan: **Cobham Drive to Buckle Street Transport Improvements**

From: **Wellington City Council**

Date: **6 October 2011**

1. Introduction

- 1.1. State Highway 1 is a critical part of Wellington. It connects the city to the North Island and provides access to key infrastructure, including Wellington International Airport, Wellington Regional Hospital, schools and universities, recreational facilities, and the National War Memorial. Its functioning affects our economy and urban environment, as well as the local transport network.
- 1.2. The Council therefore welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the state highway projects proposed by the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) within inner city Wellington.
- 1.3. Council has the dual function of enabling democratic local decision-making and action, and promoting the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wellington, in the present and for the future. In addition, the Council has specific statutory roles as the road controlling authority for the local network and the agency responsible for land use planning.
- 1.4. The Council holds the Town Belt as trustee under an 1873 deed of trust (Town Belt Deed 1873). This submission has not been considered by the Council acting in its role as trustee, and accordingly nothing in this submission can be taken as the formal position of the Town Belt trustee.
- 1.5. This submission comments on the proposals included in the public engagement document 'Cobham Drive to Buckle Street transport improvements', which seeks feedback on key aspects of the planned projects. The submission does not address the need for the state highway improvements, which was discussed in the 2010 Regional Land Transport Strategy and the Ngauranga to Wellington Airport Corridor Plan (N2A Corridor Plan).

2. Submission Summary

- 2.1. The inner city transport projects represent a major change in the future urban form of Wellington, and will improve the accessibility of the central city, southern and eastern suburbs, and the airport. The infrastructure required will exist for the long term.
- 2.2. The submission highlights a number of areas where the Council considers that further work is required, or where the proposals should be amended or refined.
- 2.3. The Council seeks to work with NZTA in an ongoing process to achieve the best possible social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes for the City from these significant transport investments.
- 2.4. The submission discusses the separate elements of the projects, commencing in Buckle Street with a discussion of the importance of the New Zealand Memorial park, the options for the Basin Reserve, the second Mt Victoria Tunnel, and the widening of Ruahine Street and Wellington Road. The final section of the submission discusses a number of technical or operational issues which the Council would expect to see addressed in the next phases of investigations.

- 2.5. On the critical issue of the preferred option at the Basin Reserve, the submission identifies option A (a bridge close to the Basin Reserve) as preferable to option B. This option will require significant mitigation, reflecting the importance of the location.
- 2.6. NZTA should ensure that the design and construction of option A is future-proofed so that it will be possible to construct an underground option at Memorial Park in the future, if funding becomes available.

3. Integrated Approach

- 3.1. New Zealand's state highway network has a vital role as the strategic road network for the country – connecting communities, enabling people to get to and from work quickly and efficiently, and providing a convenient and robust route for freight.
- 3.2. In major metropolitan areas, much of the traffic on state highways is local, and effective integration with the local transport network is essential for cities to function effectively. The transport network as a whole supports community aspirations and the development of the city, and in addition to individual transport projects having impacts on the functioning of the wider transport system, they can alter people's decisions about where they live and work.
- 3.3. It is therefore essential that transport projects are not planned in isolation, and the Council continues to support the multi-modal approach taken in the N2A Corridor Plan.
- 3.4. Council notes the importance of the inner-city state highway projects being planned and managed taking into account the links with the local transport system and other projects identified in the N2A Corridor Plan, including the Wellington bus review, Wellington public transport spine study, bus priority projects, and redevelopment of Adelaide Road. The Council will continue to work with NZTA ensure the integration between transport and other planning is maintained.

4. New Zealand Memorial Park

- 4.1. As the Council understands them, the objectives of the proposed New Zealand Memorial Park are to:
 - enhance the setting of the National War Memorial;
 - provide a space for people to congregate on ceremonial occasions such as Anzac Day;
 - create an area in the capital city for the development of new memorials from countries which New Zealand has a close relationship with;
 - provide a park to be utilised by day to day users;
 - retain and enhance the strong heritage values of the area.
- 4.2. The proposed park would provide an important addition to the inner city open space network, required by the growing city population and revitalisation of the Mt Cook centre, and provide a large green space that can be used for passive or active recreation. It could also allow for ecological functions such as storm water filtration through natural mechanisms.

- 4.3. Since plans for the park were originally announced in 2005, there have been a variety of plans put forward. While the design of the park will be significantly impacted by option eventually chosen by NZTA for grade separation at the Basin Reserve (discussed further below), under any option the following should be taken into account:
- 4.3.1. The national significance of the proposed New Zealand Memorial Park must be recognised in planning for the precinct.
 - 4.3.2. The park should make a positive contribution to the processional route linking Government House, the National War Memorial, and Parliament.
 - 4.3.3. The objectives of the park (set out in 4.1) must be taken into account in the design of the road corridor.
 - 4.3.4. The park design should ensure that the connections with Cambridge and Kent Terraces allows for the future creation of a boulevard.
 - 4.3.5. The Council's commitment of \$2 million is premised on the park objectives being met in full.

5. Basin Reserve

- 5.1. The precinct around the Basin Reserve is very significant in forming the special character of Wellington. In addition to nationally significant sites such as the National War Memorial, Government House and the Basin Reserve, there is a concentration of Council listed heritage places and New Zealand Historic Places Trust (NZHPT) registered category I and II historic places, other unregistered heritage buildings, sites of significance to Maori, archaeological sites, trees, and the area is adjacent to the Mt Victoria special character area. The Basin Reserve is the oldest first-class cricket venue in New Zealand, and one of the oldest cricket grounds in the world – safeguarding its future as an international test venue is important to Wellington.
- 5.2. The area is also a significant intersection, with a high volume of traffic both north-south and east-west. Grade separation was identified as a high priority project in the N2A Corridor Plan, and the current Regional Land Transport Programme similarly identifies it as a high priority project from a regional perspective.
- 5.3. Of the two options proposed by NZTA, the Council prefers Option A on the basis that, while the transport benefits of the two options are similar as both separate north-south traffic from east-west traffic, Option A:
- 5.3.1. aligns the proposed bridge structure with the original city grid, which is preferable to creating a structure that interferes with the built fabric further north;
 - 5.3.2. has a lesser negative impact on the proposed design of Memorial Park;
 - 5.3.3. has a less negative impact on Mt Victoria;
 - 5.3.4. provides a better alignment for a walking and cycling route;
 - 5.3.5. has less curves and is therefore contributes to overall safety.

- 5.4. In the Council's view, the former Home of Compassion crèche would need to be relocated under both Options A and B, so the only aspect in which Option B is preferred is that it lessens the impact on the Basin Reserve.
- 5.5. The proposed cycleway / walkway as part of Option A would provide a significantly improved route from Hataitai to Buckle Street (and on to Karo Drive) in comparison with the alternate route passing under the bridge and on to Kent Terrace. It would also provide cyclists with an improved connection to Tory Street, which has been identified by the Council as a key cycle route. The Council's preferred option is for the cycleway / walkway to be on the harbour side of the bridge as it provides a more favourable link to the cycle route at either end of the bridge.
- 5.6. Once a second Mt Victoria tunnel has been constructed there will be no future opportunity to increase roading capacity from Hataitai to the city, and the management of peak hour congestion will require increased focus on encouraging some commuters to switch to other modes. If a decision is made now that the bridge does not include infrastructure to support active modes, retro-fitting is likely to be required in the future at a higher cost.
- 5.7. Under this option, Buckle Street should be moved northwards to allow the maximum possible space for people to congregate in front of the New Zealand War Memorial and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, and a pedestrian crossing should be provided in front of the War Memorial.

6. Basin Reserve –further discussion on Option A

- 6.1. However, notwithstanding that Option A is preferable to Option B, it will still have a significant number of negative effects. While a standard bridge will achieve the transport objectives, it will also cut off the community from the Basin Reserve, reduce local property values, change the character of an area and therefore its redevelopment potential, and impact on the quality of life for local residents. The design of Buckle Street and the bridge structure will have a negative impact on the future New Zealand Memorial Park, which should be a place of remembrance, contemplation and also celebration.
- 6.2. NZTA's assessment of Option A is that the social impacts are minor positive, the built heritage impacts are severe negative, and the urban design impacts are minor negative¹. Although the Council agrees with the assessment of the heritage impacts, the Council does not accept the assessments of the social and urban design impacts, which understate the negative impacts.
- 6.3. The Council is aware that the NZTA estimate of the cost of Option A includes a budget for enhancing the bridge design to reflect its urban location, and for landscape and urban design treatments under and around structures etc.
- 6.4. However, further mitigation will be needed to address the visual and noise impacts on the Basin Reserve, to improve the environment around the bridge, address the visual impact from Cambridge and Kent Terraces

¹ Feasible Options Report, January 2011, Table 9.20

and Mt Victoria, and future proof for future improvements to Cambridge and Kent Terraces.

- 6.5. The integration of buildings with the bridge structure, a bridge structure that includes arcades for commercial or recreational space, artwork and lighting treatments on the structure, alternate materials and finishes, extensive screening planting and landscaping should all be investigated. Option A is not acceptable without significantly more mitigation than is currently provided for.
- 6.6. Given the nationally significant location and the potential benefits of an underground option, NZTA should ensure that the design and construction of option A is future-proofed so that it will be possible to construct an underground option through Memorial Park in the future, if funding becomes available.

7. Second Mt Victoria Tunnel

- 7.1. The Council supports the proposed alignment of the Mt Victoria tunnel to the north of the existing tunnel.
- 7.2. However, Council recognises the impact on the heritage fabric of Mt Victoria. Etterick House (listed on the District Plan and an NZHPT category II historic place) and the former Catholic Presbytery at 7 Paterson Street are both affected, in addition to the removal of other pre 1930's dwellings and changes to the local grid pattern.
- 7.3. The Council supports NZTA investigating the relocation of both Etterick House (which has been relocated previously) and the former Catholic Presbytery within the Mt Victoria character area, and giving further consideration of how the tunnel entrance and surroundings integrate with the existing buildings and the urban landscape.
- 7.4. The Council supports the provision of walking and cycling facilities in the new tunnel as existing facilities will no longer be accessible after the new tunnel is added to the north, and as the removal of the walkway from the existing tunnel will allow the lane spacing to be improved.
- 7.5. The most significant issues identified by walkers and cyclists using the current Mt Victoria tunnel are noise, air quality, width of path, and smell², and it is important that these issues are addressed by the tunnel design.
- 7.6. The design should include a wall (with window) between the pedestrians and cyclists and the vehicles, along with other features such as lighting, security cameras, emergency phones, and other amenity measures such as a ventilation system.

8. Ruahine Street and Wellington Road

- 8.1. While it has various impacts which will need to be considered, the option of widening Ruahine Street to the west (which would require the compulsory acquisition of Town Belt land) is preferable to widening into the residential area to the east.

² For example, see Traffic Design Group, November 2009. Mt Victoria Tunnel Pedestrian and Cyclist Interviews, Survey Report

8.2. The Council supports the decisions to

8.2.1. remove the right turn out of Taurima Street to Ruahine Street, which is unsafe, causes congestion, and allows rat running by people attempting to avoid queues on Ruahine Street;

8.2.2. install signals at Goa Street, improving access to Hataitai Park and addressing the congestion that occurs at this intersection, particularly at weekends.

8.3. The Council is concerned that the benefits from the widening of Ruahine Street to the extent proposed in time savings for vehicular traffic are not outweighed by unnecessary negatives impacts on:

- other modes of travel
- good urban form
- local connectivity and accessibility
- the amenity of the adjoining Hataitai community
- the Town Belt.

8.4. The widening proposed would see the majority of Ruahine Street being 5 or 6 lanes, with 7 lanes at intersections in addition to the proposed service lane. The increase from 4 lanes greatly increases the amount of land required from the Town Belt, and creates a significant barrier between Hataitai and the Town Belt.

8.5. The Council consistently receives feedback from the community that 6 or 7 lanes of traffic are experienced as a barrier between the CBD and the waterfront³, in spite of the frequent signalised pedestrian crossings and overbridges. The proposed layout of Ruahine Street creates a similar barrier to a major recreational space.

8.6. The width of traffic lanes, presence of a central median, turning lanes and traffic design speeds all need to be re-considered in the light of the use of the road and the adjoining uses in the Town Belt and Hataitai, focusing on providing a high capacity urban street, which integrates with the urban fabric. The Council would like to work with NZTA to identify an appropriate balance between achieving the maximum transport benefits and achieving a road that is appropriate in its local space.

8.7. The Council supports improvements to the intersection of Ruahine Street and Wellington Road to improve safety while maintaining its current function as part of a dangerous goods and oversized vehicle route.

8.8. As with Ruahine Street, further work on the design speed and turning lanes should be undertaken to see if the size of the cut required into the Town Belt can be reduced.

8.9. The road alignment will have significant impact on property owners, given the need to acquire 19 properties, some of which have multiple owners. Given the uncertainty created by the long time frame until construction is scheduled, mechanisms should be put in place to assist owners who wish to sell in the interim, and reduce the impact of uncertainty relating to the timing of the projects.

³ Most recently, in the just completed public consultation on Wellington 2040

9. Impact on the Town Belt

- 9.1. For more than 100 years, Wellingtonians have used and enjoyed the Town Belt in many different ways, and the Town Belt is considered an important part of Wellington's open space by the community. It includes parks and play areas, around one-third of the sportsfields, buildings and facilities used by Wellington's sports and recreation groups (including Hataitai Park) walking and mountain biking tracks, and areas of native and exotic vegetation.
- 9.2. The projects will impact on the Town Belt in a number of ways, including:
 - 9.2.1. the loss of land, noting that the Town Belt extends to the east side of Ruahine Street
 - 9.2.2. landscape impacts on the Town Belt as a visual backdrop to Wellington, particularly at the tunnel portal's against Mt Alfred and where large cuttings are required
 - 9.2.3. loss of amenity and changes to the character of parts of the Town Belt adjacent to Ruahine Street resulting from the increased volume of traffic and width of the road
 - 9.2.4. displacement of recreational activities, particularly badminton and the dog exercise area, and the displacement of Hataitai Kindergarten
 - 9.2.5. loss of mature trees and indigenous vegetation
 - 9.2.6. improved vehicular access at Goa Street,
 - 9.2.7. changes to parking in Ruahine Street and traffic impacts in Moxham Ave that are likely to impact on the demand for parking for Hataitai Park, particularly at weekends
- 9.3. The Council would like to continue working with NZTA in the next phase of the project to identify how these impacts can be reduced or mitigated, and to ensure the protection of open space amenity and other valuable parts of the Town Belt such as the mature tree framework. Mana whenua should be invited to join in these discussions.
- 9.4. Future discussions about nature and level of compensation for the loss of Town Belt land will be required with the Council acting as trustee.

10. Pedestrian and Cycle Path

- 10.1. The proposed pedestrian and cycle path adjacent to Ruahine Street and Wellington Road will also function as a service lane for residential access. The Council supports the provision of facilities for walking and cycling, and in particular supports an off-road cycle facility.
- 10.2. The Council has the following concerns about the safety and effectiveness of this proposal:
 - 10.2.1. It is unclear how the intersections will work safely, particularly at the intersections with Goa Street and Hamilton Road where vehicles will need to join busy traffic.

10.2.2. The combination of vehicular traffic (even if only at low volumes) with cycling and walking within one undivided path is likely to be unsafe.

10.2.3. As a result of the service lane function, there are sections where visitors to properties or service vehicles are likely to park in the lane, reducing the safety of other users.

10.3. Adequate provision for walking, cycling, and vehicular access to houses is essential; the Council would welcome the opportunity to work with NZTA to refine the current proposal to make it more workable.

11. Other local impacts

11.1. The removal of the right turn at Taurima Street, changes to intersections at Goa Street, and removal of access from Moxham Avenue and Walmer Street to Wellington Road will have a cumulative impact that significantly changes the pattern of traffic on local streets in Hataitai.

11.2. To a certain extent these changes are unavoidable, but Council would like to work with NZTA to ensure that community concerns about local traffic are addressed to the greatest extent possible.

11.3. The loss of space at Kilbirnie Park space will impact on both winter (rugby and football) and summer (cricket) codes in what is an important space for formal sports, particularly as the demand for sports fields already exceeds supply. It is essential that any reconfiguration of this park provides for these sports and Council would like to work with NZTA to ensure this can be achieved.

12. Other Issues

12.1. This section of the submission raises a variety of technical or operational issues which the Council would expect to see addressed in the next phases of investigations.

12.2. Transport and local roading impacts

- The Council looks forward to work to clarify the impact of projects on local roads as soon as practicable, and to engagement with NZTA on the Inner City Bypass optimisation project. There is currently no funding allocated in the regional land transport programme for Council expenditure arising from these projects.
- Early consideration should be given to how Buckle Street will be managed when there are occasions at the War Memorial that are likely to be attended by large volumes of people.
- The introduction of slip lanes at intersections is generally not supported due to the negative impact for pedestrians. This is particularly an issue at the intersection of Wellington Road with Hamilton Road / Kilbirnie Crescent.

12.3. Heritage

- The earthworks associated with the various projects are likely to disturb a number of archaeological sites (as defined in the Historic

Places Act 1993) and will therefore require archaeological authority from the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. A protocol for dealing with accidental discoveries should be established.

- The project is likely to provide opportunities to capture information about a number of sites, such as the culvert containing the waterway under Cambridge and Kent Terrace, sites in Mt Victoria, the northern slopes of Hataitai and Kilbirnie Park. Work should be undertaken to ensure these opportunities are maximised.

12.4. Basin Reserve

- In addition to the built heritage around the Basin Reserve, there are a number of significant trees around that should be protected and retained where possible.
- The landscaping improvements should result in a net increase in trees, acknowledging that either option results in loss of substantial trees, and that the planting under the bridge is impracticable.

12.5. Town Belt issues

- The natural environment assessment (technical report) provided on the NZTA website is based on the 1995 Town Belt Management Plan, which is significantly out of date, and the assessment should therefore not be relied upon without being updated.
- Planning should be undertaken to ensure there are no impacts on the children's bike skills area above the intersection of Wellington Road and Ruahine Street.
- Where practicable, large mature trees should be relocated.
- The access onto the Town Belt across Wellington Road and to the Hataitai to City track entrance/exit off Taurima Street should be retained.
- Landscaping should take into account the proximity of the Town Belt. The Council would appreciate the opportunity to have input into the practicality and suitability of the detailed plans.

12.6. Consultation

- There should be adequate consultation and liaison with Port Nicholson Block Settlement Trust and Te Runanga O Toa Rangatira on the impacts on the Town Belt, and the significance of particular sites, including the edge of Kilbirnie Park where there is a strong likelihood of archaeological remains of Maori settlement.
- Council would like to continue to be involved in discussions with affected sports clubs and the kindergarten.

12.7. Construction

- Council would like to be involved in discussions early on in the planning for the mitigation of construction effects on the use of and access into Hataitai Park, Kilbirnie Park, and the wider Town Belt during construction.

- **Council would be interested in discussion of potential disposal sites for any material being removed during construction of the second tunnel and realignment of Ruahine Street and Wellington Road.**