

Submission to the Ministry of Transport Discussion Document

Safer Journeys 2020

Submission from Living Streets Hamilton, a branch of Living Streets Aotearoa (www.livingstreets.org.nz)

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Living Streets groups promote the use of walking for routine transport and for recreation. For walking to become a regular means of transport for New Zealanders on a daily basis, it is vital that walking is safe for everyone, regardless of age or level of physical ability. We are facing crises in public health due to obesity, diabetes and heart disease, along with major environmental issues connected with carbon emissions and climate change. Encouraging as many New Zealanders as possible to walk, cycle and use public transport where possible is vital in addressing these issues.

We would like to preface our submission with a quote from *“The Humane Metropolis: people and nature in the 21st century”* by Rutherford H Platt. It relates originally to the USA but we believe it applies equally to New Zealand:

“In almost every... city the bulk of the right of way is given to vehicles; the least, to people on foot. This is in inverse relationship to need.”

Living Streets Hamilton is very much in support of almost all the measures suggested in the Safer Journeys Initiatives, but we would like to emphasise certain issues in the hope that they will be viewed with a higher priority than is currently indicated.

Safer walking and cycling is currently listed as a “Medium Concern”. We feel very strongly that this should be an area of High Concern. At present, cyclists and walkers suffer a disproportionate amount of damage on the roads when the numbers of deaths and injuries are compared to the small proportions of people actually regularly cycling and walking to work and school. The perceived danger means that many people (especially children) do not take the simple, healthy and environmentally friendly option of walking or biking the relatively short distances often involved in getting to work or school. The ‘suppressed demand’ for walking and cycling is very difficult to quantify, and studies are urgently needed to investigate the extent to which New Zealanders are prevented from walking or cycling by the real or perceived dangers they face on the roads.

Potential difficulties with current Government policy and funding protocols

From our recent involvement in consultations with NZTA on possible pedestrian improvements in very dangerous urban walking situations (crossing SH1 to reach the Hamilton Gardens; crossing Ohaupo Rd to access schools and supermarkets; investigating pedestrian options for the proposed Te Rapa bypass), it has become apparent that funding for pedestrian and cycling facilities is determined by “Benefit Cost Ratios” which are heavily skewed towards vehicle users’ convenience.

For example, the proposed at-grade crossing of Cobham Drive, with a pedestrian-controlled light system, emerges with a “net disbenefit” because it slows down cars and increases the risk of rear-end collisions (despite the fact that there is a roundabout a few hundred metres away which would have the same disbenefits). There appears to be little or no consideration of the monetary gains attached to reduced car use, reduced road maintenance costs, reduced carbon emissions, increased public health (and therefore reduced health costs by minimising heart disease, obesity and diabetes among other major public health problems) if walking and cycling could be encouraged. This seems largely to be due to difficulty of measurement.

We are very concerned that until fundamental calculations such as this are addressed, improvements to pedestrian and cycle safety are unlikely to occur. While this is outside the immediate scope of the discussion document, we view it as a major impediment to future progress. Often engineers and planners involved in these discussions acknowledge the need for safety improvements but don't seriously consider them - they know these are unlikely to be funded because of the way the calculations are presently done. With the current government's emphasis on highway construction (funding having been removed from the walking and cycling budget for this purpose) we are concerned that the very sensible measures proposed in the draft Safer Journeys document will not be able to be implemented.

We would also like to support the proposition from the Accessible Transport Action Committee (ATAC) with regard to the review of NZS 4404:2004 to include a nationally standardised “Safe System” for walking infrastructure

The disabled community also represents the needs of cyclists and pedestrians - if a system can be devised that works for the disabled sector of the population, it will work safely for everyone. We are in complete agreement with ATAC that an opportunity currently exists to get genuine, enforceable standards developed for walking and cycling infrastructures. Reviews such as this occur seldom and this is the ideal opportunity to make sure New Zealand has safe and accessible design for its streets.

We are hopeful that the Community Focussed Land Transport Activities initiated in 2007 are to be retained.

This system meant that from July 2007, community activities were funded under the same model as infrastructure activities by Land Transport New Zealand, with funding at 75% of the cost eligible for financial assistance. This funding was directly oriented towards safety and sustainability projects, with specific emphasis on: generating increased understanding of the health, energy, environmental and other benefits and costs of transport mode choices; increasing the perception of public transport as safe and accessible; increasing the perception of walking and cycling as safe, convenient, cheap and clean modes of transport; promoting the importance of good vehicle maintenance to optimise efficiency, and promoting understanding of the linkages between urban design and transport demand. Considerable effort has already been invested in major planning documents such as “The Pedestrian Planning and Design Guide”, and the earlier Government Strategy “Getting there – on foot, by cycle”. The document produced in 2007 (see <http://www.landtransport.govt.nz/travel/docs/promoting-community-sustain-projects.pdf>) specifically addresses Neighbourhood Accessibility Plans, as are discussed in the present document, and the funding system set up at that time appeared to offer hope of actually being able to get some of these excellent community-focussed ideas into practice.

Addressing the issues immediately pertinent to the discussion document, we would particularly like to comment on the following:

Reduction of legal Blood Alcohol Limit:

We are in total support of the proposed reduction, and of the proposed zero BAC limit for young drivers and recidivist offenders, along with the use of alcohol interlocks where appropriate. The use of heavy demerit points and harsh financial penalties for infringement of BAC regulations may help in getting the point across. Immediate confiscation of the vehicle may also be helpful in dealing with recidivism.

Improving the Safety of Young Drivers:

We support the raising of the driving age and the extension of the learner licence period. The inclusion of further supervised driving time once on a restricted licence is a good idea – currently young people are allowed to progress directly from constant supervision on a learner licence to completely independent solo driving the moment they acquire a restricted licence, and they are given no encouragement to undertake defensive driver training until they have completed several months of unsupervised solo driving. It would be much more sensible to ensure that thorough, practically-based defensive driving tuition is undertaken as soon as a young person has obtained their restricted licence.

Making Roads Safer:

We are very much in support of accident prevention at intersections by using traffic control systems such as lights, traffic calming measures, raised pedestrian crossings. We are generally not in favour of roundabouts as they are extremely hazardous to cyclists and pedestrians and become increasingly so as traffic volumes increase.

We support the alteration of traffic rules to remove the current very confusing right-turning traffic giving way to left-turning traffic at intersections. This has always had a high accident potential and pedestrians and cyclists have always been at risk from it.

We also support the alteration of give way rules for pedestrians on non-light controlled intersections. We feel the adoption of automatic give-way by vehicles to pedestrians is a major step in the right direction. In many countries, pedestrians and cyclists have automatic priority and motorists know that any collision involving a vehicle and a non-motorised road user is automatically the motorist's fault. This engenders a much higher degree of awareness of pedestrian and cycle needs.

We are very much in favour of the development and support of new approaches to safety for pedestrians on urban mixed-use arterials. This however links back to the concern expressed at the beginning of this submission: that funding for pedestrian safety measures is not easily obtainable because of the current method of calculation of benefit cost ratios. Until this is addressed, we doubt that adequate safety measures such as pedestrian controlled lights, underpasses and overbridges are likely to be funded, and pedestrians will continue to be second-class citizens who are at risk every time they try to cross a major arterial road.

Safer Speeds:

We are completely in support of moderating speeds on arterials. Cobham Drive is a current case in point. This State Highway which separates Hamiltonians from the Hamilton Gardens has a speed limit of 80kph over a 1km stretch between a roundabout and a bridge which has a 30kph limit at one end due to a right-angled turn. This is an absurdity in a heavily populated area. There are many cases like it throughout the country. Addressing them would improve safety considerably for all road users.

We are also in complete support of the idea of lowering speed limits in central city streets and residential neighbourhoods. Very low speed limits are used in many European cities in such areas and this greatly enhances pedestrian and cycle access to these areas.

Safety of Cyclists and Pedestrians:

As mentioned earlier, we feel this should be a very high priority in order to address a number of social and environmental issues.

We are completely in support of the idea of improving accessibility to local facilities via the use of Neighbourhood Accessibility Plans. This is the best possible outcome for most communities. However, plans are useless without the funding to carry them to completion. We are unable to see how such admirable plans can be executed under the prevailing government philosophy, and hope that there will be a change in priorities once the full implications of increased pedestrian and cycle safety are realised.

We are also very much in support of the education aspects promoted in the strategy for motorist awareness of pedestrian and cyclists needs, and improved safety training of young road users at school. A suggestion from one of our members is that all intermediate school children should complete a road safety programme to help them fully understand the dangers of dealing with motor vehicles. At present cycle skill training is available (ref Land Transport "I want to ride my bike", cycle skill/training) but it would be helpful if this course was made mandatory for all children of this age and also included instruction on pedestrian safety.

However we also feel that the main way to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety is to make sure that appropriate infrastructure exists to allow them to deal safely with motor vehicles or alternatively take routes which do not involve interactions with vehicles on busy roads. This takes careful planning and considerable money to achieve, but may pay off handsomely in the long run with a healthier population, a cleaner environment and reduced road maintenance costs.

In conclusion, Living Streets Hamilton reiterates its support for the measures proposed in the draft Safer Journeys strategy and would be delighted to see them implemented as soon as possible. Unfortunately we also feel that this is unlikely to occur without a major overhaul of current government transport policy and funding procedures. Failure to implement the Safer Journeys strategy may result in ongoing danger to all road users, unnecessary death and injury, reduced public health and unnecessary costs in dealing with environmental and public health issues which could be solved very simply by a change of emphasis away from road building and towards support of safe travel using alternatives to private motor vehicles.