

The Wellington Civic Trust believes that Scenario A could enable a more liveable city if priority was given to public transport, walking, cycling and open space. Accordingly, WCT supports Scenario A+ (Scenario A plus the installation of a light rail system). We understand that Scenario A+ has been developed and described in considerable detail by other Wellington civil society groups.

We reject Scenario B,C,D as compromising these values and for failing to meet the approved objectives for the project, particularly by providing for new roading and tunnels which will inevitably worsen traffic volume in this area and throughout the city.

Increased city and region wide roading development inevitably leads to worse traffic and car congestion, resulting in outcomes opposite to that found in vibrant green cities elsewhere in the world. Instead, an urban design that optimised walkability and the use of high quality public transport between urban islands, would reduce the need to travel and the associated ills of noise, time wastage, lowered air quality health and ambience.

High Capacity Public Transport

High capacity public transport such as modern light rail can help provide the needed capacity to remove both bus and car congestion in the inner city and at the Basin Reserve. It could be an efficient alternative choice to private vehicle users potentially allowing fast access to the Airport and eastern suburbs and at the same time removing the need for private vehicles to enter the CBD. Light rail is the most expensive public transport mode - however, it is cheap compared to the cost of new roads and their associated ills of loss of prime quality land, safety hazards, air pollution and greenhouse emissions. It also fosters transit-oriented development along the route, which could be used to lower the cost of installation.

Improved city ambience

In a recent survey by Deutsche Bank in Germany, Wellington ranks as the city with the best quality of life in the world. Scenario B,C,D are a serious threat to Wellington's top quality of life ranking, because the "induced traffic" they would inevitably generate. High quality public transport, cycling and walking will improve the quality of life, improve mobility and improve human health.

The fundamental aspect of a city is its people - a city must be designed around dense walkable core suburbs connected by efficient public transport and safe cycle routes.

Cities that adopt a high quality urban environment result in lower living costs, attract more tourists and support more vibrant business.

New suburban facilities should be constructed close to transport hubs. The need for movement (travel) and new roads is reduced when a higher quality urban environment containing all essential services is facilitated. This is especially important for inner city residents, but also in potential urban islands such as Newtown, Kilbirnie, Miramar, Karori, Johnsonville. Karori containing the highest population of any city suburb, urgently needs a high school to reduce cross city school traffic.

For example, the Indoor Sports Centre in Kilbirnie, is not on a public transport route, has difficult vehicle access from every suburb except Kilbirnie, and no foot and cycle access from the Evans Bay cycle/walkway. The Sports Centre could have been sited over the railway yards which would have then made it a regional asset.

Restriction of private vehicle entry and street parking within the city will lower noise levels and allow for much more green, pedestrian space and cycle routes, parks and tree promenades.

The promised removal of a traffic lane on the Quays and replacement with a cycleway, would connect Wellington's CBD to its waterfront, as well as giving greater support to cyclists.

Sydney City Council has responded to retail demands to reduce noise and air pollution by replacing diesel buses with zero emission light rail. Removal of private vehicles from the Golden Mile and their replacement with widened pedestrian promenades and modern light rail extending from the railway station to the eastern and southern suburbs and the airport, could lead to similar high quality outcomes.

WCT has a history of strong commentary on civic design issues and could provide LGWM with further information on the importance of a quality public transport system to enhance city design elements.

Climate Change and Sea Level rise

The elephant in the room is climate change, and there is now a global consensus that we are facing a crisis. Ending fossil fuel use within cities, as is happening elsewhere in the world, will bring improved air quality and lowered greenhouse emissions, a prime objective of both central and local Government. Cities such as Oslo, are committed to ending fossil fuel use by 2025.

The IPCC 2013 report forecasts a maximum 80cm sea level rise this century. MfE Coastal Guidance (MfE Dec 2017), recommends stress-testing SLR decisions which will have long-term consequences at higher levels, particularly for decisions over more than 100 years * It proposes an adaptive pathways approach to planning so that early decisions do not “lock in” plans that cannot be adapted to greater changes (if required) in the long term. Note that a two metre sea level rise would result in the inundation of much of Wellington CBD, access roads to the airport and eastern suburbs, SH2 to the the Hutt Valley, Petone and parts of Hutt city.

An innovative design of a light rail transport system could help provide an effective mechanism to start to build city infrastructure that can better-cope with sea-level-rise. Planning for exclusive use of zero emissions vehicles alongside much better facilities for walking and cycling will also reduce the need for retrofitting expensive new roading related infrastructure that will soon be impacted by emission cuts.

Almost a decade has been wasted on attempts to increase traffic and roading since the public forum called for public transport, cycling and walking solutions at the Wellington Civic Trust public forum “About the Basin” in August 2009. We ask the councils and government to discard their ambitions to induce even more traffic by roading projects, and to build the first-world public transport, cycling and walking solutions sought by Wellingtonians.

* <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/climate-change/coastal-hazards-and-climate-change-guidance-local-government>

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