

Submission to the Wellington City Council on the Draft Transport Strategy (February 2004)

from Living Streets Aotearoa, Wellington Branch

19 March 2004

Introducing Living Streets Aotearoa

Living Streets Aotearoa (LSA) is a group with the following objectives:

- To promote walking as a healthy, environmentally-friendly and universal means of transport and recreation.
- To promote the social and economic benefits of pedestrian-friendly communities.
- To work for improved access and conditions for walkers, pedestrians and runners e.g. walking surfaces, traffic flows, speed and safety.
- To advocate for greater representation of walker and pedestrian concerns in urban and regional land use and transport planning and, as appropriate, at a national level.

For more information, please see: <http://www.livingstreets.org.nz/index.html>

General strategic comment on the draft strategy

At present, the strategy lacks a sufficiently clear connection between its vision and principles on the one hand, and its policies/actions on the other. We believe that a strategic message, a statement of **direction** (consistent with the principles in Section 2.0 and placed after those principles) should be included. This could be along the following lines (and would then perhaps be followed by a linked discussion of 'urban form', which is also useful):

Strategic Direction

Consistent with the vision and principles above, the direction of transition which this strategy promotes is one which encourages the features which make Wellington distinctive, innovative and exciting. This means transport systems which accommodate and encourage development of a dense but livable inner city with a high quality of life, and the promotion of more sustainable transport modes, especially increased walking, cycling and use of public transport, so that future access demands are met in a creative and integrated manner.

Q1. What do you like most about the Wellington City transport system?

- Key features of the present transport system which we like are the relatively high proportion of people using public transport and active transport modes (walking and cycling), and the declining proportion using private vehicles for commuting.
- In the draft strategy's background papers it is stated that "the city is ... characterised by relatively high levels of public transport. This makes Wellington's transport profile more similar to a large European or Canadian City than other New Zealand, Australian or American cities." (p4). We agree with this, consider the distinctiveness of Wellington important and significant, especially for reinforcing Wellington's image and reality as a creative, innovative city where people find the environment livable and friendly.
- We note that the proportion of people commuting by private vehicle is now starting to fall (1996 to 2001), and the proportions using active transport modes (walking and cycling) or public transport are rising (p14 and Figure 4). It is not clear to LSA that demand for car transport in Wellington will grow, especially if that demand is not validated by building new roads.
- LSA considers that increased travel times for car commuters are (within limits) acceptable. We do not accept that an increase in travel times is an indicator of poor performance of the transport system. In our view, the statement that "travel times are increasing because growth in travel is rapidly consuming any spare road capacity, and projections indicate a steady decline in the performance of the system" (p5) is misconceived. Rather, performance should be assessed in terms of access, not travel times. If many people are living more centrally, their reduced travel times will not be counted in a survey of vehicle travel times, but their access may be greatly improved. Similarly, other dimensions of system performance such as increased physical activity (walking, cycling) and the quality of the urban environment are just important or more important than travel times, and increased vehicle travel times may be necessary in order to provide incentives for people to switch to more environmentally and community-friendly modes. Many European cities have deliberately **not** facilitated increased vehicle traffic flows, or have actively restricted road space in central areas, in order to maintain a balance between modes, recognizing that some traffic delays are necessary to encourage an optimal modal mix.
- More fundamentally, LSA supports a balanced and integrated transport system, which we consider Wellington's system could (with appropriate management) become. In a balanced system, increases in active transport and public transport ease excessive congestion on the roading network, and make further costly infrastructure investment (other than road quality improvements or upkeep) unnecessary. At the same time, some congestion is likely to be optimal. We see a balanced and integrated system as involving higher levels of walking, cycling and public transport, with modal choices influenced by individual needs and an awareness of and response to sustainability factors (from air quality issues, to concern with local community cohesion).

- LSA supports much of the Draft Transport Strategy, especially where it acknowledges important features of Wellington’s transport system. Examples of statements that we strongly support are:
 - “Inner city living will also make up an important component of growth and minimise the need for additional transport infrastructure investment” (p4)
 - “The compact nature of Wellington and its ‘walkability’ is highly valued by residents” (p9)
 - “International practice shows that traffic calming and home zones also [as well as benefiting cyclists] benefit pedestrians, road safety, active journeys for children and local residents” (p10).
 - “There is an increased awareness of the potential benefits of walking, both in terms of health and as a tool for reducing traffic demands, especially for peak period commuter journeys. This is recognised by national, regional and city policy positions.” (Transport Strategy Background Papers, p163).

Q2. What do you like least about the Wellington City transport system?

- LSA considers Wellington to be too car-dependent at present, although, as noted above, this may be improving. While the largest group of commuters (49%) is reported to use private vehicles to travel to work, this statistic refers only to the main form of transport. A large number of those who drive to work have to also walk to their office from their car-park. Considering the large and increasing number of non-car trips, we consider that Wellington has become too oriented towards facilitating car travel (e.g. through providing too many car-parks and concentrating too much on vehicle traffic facilitation). We consider that this needs to change, and welcome the draft strategy’s moves away from car dependence (some would say car domination). We believe that creative, attractive and competitive cities around the world are also heading in this direction.
- LSA also considers accident rates for pedestrians and cyclists to be unacceptable, and to reflect the discouraging nature of aspects of the transport environment in Wellington in respect of walking, and the relatively hostile nature of the transport environment in respect of cycling. We agree with the assessment in the draft strategy that “Accidents involving cyclists and pedestrians are an area of concern” (p12), but consider this to be an understatement. It is an issue which should be actively and rapidly addressed in order to encourage walking and cycling and – in general – a more ‘livable’ environment in Wellington.
- Freight traffic can have a significant impact on the quality of Wellington’s environment. Freight gets very light treatment in the draft Strategy, but freight traffic (particularly to and from the ferry terminals and the airport) has a significant impact on the livability of some streets. In the CBD in particular, couriers and shop deliveries often have a very significant impact – not least because courier vans/trucks can be parked on footpaths. This issue should be addressed, e.g. through enforcement.

Q3. Where do you think the biggest improvements could be made, over the next three years?

Reducing car dependence

- A central objective should be to address car dependence. Wellington has the opportunity to do something bold and innovative here, starting within the next three years. Other forms of transport should be actively encouraged, rather than “catered for”. Deliberate encouragement of active transport modes and public transport would be consistent with the RLTS and the Government’s Transport Strategy.
- The draft strategy states (as noted above) that Wellington’s transport profile is more similar to a large European City than other New Zealand cities. As such, LSA considers we should be adopting best practice ideas from European cities which provide incentives for reduced car use. An example is the transport goal of the city of York in the UK - “To promote a transport system that leads to a healthier society by reducing the amount of car traffic in the City and encouraging more sustainable forms of travel.”¹ A recent vision for urban transport in Europe includes the comment:

“In the longer term, high quality liveable cities ... must be the basis for sustainable development. Cities allow people to have high levels of access to services and facilities, they promote proximity and social interactions, permit the provision of a range of public transport services and are generally less consumptive in terms of resource use per person. The argument is not for megacities or for very high levels of density, but for a range of city sizes sufficient to provide a full range of facilities within walking, cycling or public transport distance.”²
- The draft strategy’s background papers (p4) suggest that car ownership and use is showing no signs of levelling off in any developed country. However, this is a misleading generalisation. For instance, car passenger-km per capita are levelling off in the UK, Sweden and Finland,³ and in a number of cities or city centres.
- In support of reducing car dependence, we note that new roads do not reduce congestion, as experience has shown in the 1980s, but rather, result over time in increases in total traffic. For example the following comment has been made about new roads in England: "New roads did not significantly reduce traffic on the routes they were designed to relieve but resulted in phenomenal

¹ <http://www.york.gov.uk/transport/ltf/chapter3.pdf> page 9

² http://www.trg.soton.ac.uk/rosetta/reports/context_d5/future.htm

³ http://www.trg.soton.ac.uk/rosetta/reports/context_d5/appendix1.htm (Rosetta study). For more background on Rosetta, see http://www.trg.soton.ac.uk/rosetta/reports/context_d5/rosetta.htm

traffic increases on the new roads until a new state of congestion stopped further growth, usually after three to five years."⁴

- An assumption is made in the draft strategy that car travel will increase around 3%. We do not agree with this projection and are concerned that it may be self-fulfilling if roading is built to accommodate it. Inner city living is increasing, and congestion can act to limit car travel.
- LSA agrees with not "significantly increasing road network capacity in the city in the medium term". We also approve of traffic management techniques, public transport improvements and demand management measures. We note that when actions are listed, the short and medium term actions all involve roading improvements. We disagree with according priority to roading.

Improving public transport

- The draft strategy calls for support for and investment in public transport, and we strongly agree with this. Concrete plans for this element seem to be relatively weak in the draft strategy, although measures to increase bus priority (p8) are welcome. Other concrete measures to strengthen public transport should be considered, so that people have a mix of reliable and convenient alternatives to car transport.
- Currently there is nothing in the strategy about the cost to the consumer of public transport. It needs to be economically viable to take public transport. What needs to be recognised and provided for is that road traffic does not pay its full cost (especially motorway traffic at congested times), while public transport users pay much closer to full cost. This imbalance should be rectified, with the assistance of central government funding assistance.
- We believe that the Council should not take a "neutral stance in relation to trolley versus diesel buses" (p9) but should actively give precedence to trolley buses because of their superior environmental (ambient air pollution and noise) attributes.

Travel Demand Management (TDM)

- The focus of the TDM section of the draft strategy is on pricing measures and spreading the peaks of travel. Good TDM can however be much more than this. It can include individualised behaviour change interventions aiming to help people increase their levels of physical activity, fostering of more inner city living and urban design improvement, working from home, encouraging flexible work and school hours, price incentives penalising inner city car use, and vigorous encouragement of alternative modes.

⁴ Elliott, J, **Local Transport Today**, 7 Aug 2003; p12; see also Whitelegg, J (2002): http://www.brisinst.org.au/resources/brisbane_institute_whitelegg3.html

- We believe more energy and imagination should be applied in developing TDM rather than investing in costly roading infrastructure.
- Increased car usage seems in the draft strategy to be, but should not be, viewed as inevitable. This misses the opportunity for creative TDM interventions. There include opportunities for reducing or removing the need to travel (e.g. through teleconferencing; other ICT applications). And while the draft strategy alludes to higher occupancy and travel plans, there are not adequate corresponding actions planned to encourage these measures.

Encouragement of walking

- LSA supports much of what the draft strategy proposes in respect of walking. In general, we note that WCC's strategy should be kept closely aligned to the draft national (MOT) strategy on walking and cycling, as that is advanced.
- LSA considers that promotion of retail shopping will follow more from encouragement of walking than it does from increasing car flows. We warn against misinterpreting the statement (p3) that "Successful retail is dependent on the ability of shoppers to get to their destinations with ease." This statement could be misinterpreted to mean that parking outside retail outlets is what is wanted. While access is important, high quality walking access is preferable. We understand that businesses in Cuba Mall have increased their turnover since it was made into a mall and upgraded. LSA consider that retail success will generally be enhanced by increasing the number of pedestrians, rather than increasing traffic flows.
- We propose that Lambton Quay be converted to a pedestrian and bus-only zone for all or most of its length. Few cars currently use this street, in any event, and delivery vehicles could be allowed access at certain times of day.
- LSA generally supports the walking measures proposed – if the route development goes ahead quickly. To promote walking we also need
 - clear signage, maps and promotion. This will help to increase the modal shift to walking.
 - Maintenance of walking surfaces, sufficient kerb cut-outs (for buggies and wheelchairs) and plenty of kerb extensions.
 - Completion of footpath on one side of the road must be aim within 7 years – to tie in with the safer roads timetable.
 - Enforcement of red-light compliance, speed limits and no footpath parking are important
 - Safer roads is a great project – it needs full community involvement – possibly a steering group as well as individual communities. We support general 40km/hr - not necessarily 50km/hr on arterials.
 - Schools need considerable administration support and encouragement to initiate and maintain Walking school buses and Safe Routes to Schools – these should be included in the Transport strategy budget

- Better information / research on travel modes outside work travel is essential e.g. mode to school, mode for shopping, mode for visiting friends.
- Travel plans for organisations with over 20 employees are essential – EECA’s skills and capacities can be utilised here.
- We consider that the WCC should integrate these proposed measures into a walking strategy, and give it some publicity. This need not be an expensive exercise. LSA would be keen to work with the council on specific measures and issues. We would wish to discuss priority routes and walking issues – e.g. the Railway Station – Waterfront route and Waterfront to CBD routes involve acknowledged problems of getting to the waterfront and Post Office Square, but there are several other access points from the waterfront to the CBD where there are problems. Similarly, we would like to discuss a boulevard along Kent-Cambridge Tce - while appealing in theory, this area is traffic-intensive and has a problem with boy racers. Planting large trees may not be ideal, and this is not really a pedestrian type of environment.

4. *Where do you think the biggest improvements could be made over the next 10 years?*

- Over time, key initiatives worthy of consideration include greater emphasis on trialing and evaluation of household travel behaviour change initiatives, e.g. promoting travel alternatives through a local access guide; partnering with businesses to extend travel options and encouraging ridesharing, carpooling and vanpooling; public transport promotion and building awareness for travel behaviour change, where people are made aware of alternatives.
- The general direction of change should be away from car-dependence to more inner city living, increased telecommuting, and a better balance of modes, with greater encouragement of walking and cycling and public transport.
- We would suggest WCC consider working with ICLEI (the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, <http://www.iclei.org/anz/>)

5. *Other Comments*

- Not enough mention is made of the benefits of walking. "Walking and cycling have a positive effect on community cohesion and are environmentally sustainable with positive health benefits" as stated in the discussion document.
- There needs to be a good proof-read of the final strategy document (e.g. on page 9 it says “residents walk to walk” (and there are other examples)).

Living Streets Aotearoa wishes to appear in support of, and speak to, this submission at the appropriate time.

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