



DOUBLE THE FEET ON THE STREET

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Abstract Remit

This paper explores two issues related to Doubling the Feet on the Street.

The first part of this paper identifies the characteristics which are required in urban street layouts to empower people to walk.

Street patterns are the key to successful walking areas. No amount of education and traffic calming can make people walk. If people cannot see where they are going, if they know they are walking 300m in circles, when in fact their destination is only 100m away, if the journey is repetitive and boring and if there are no choices, no sense of scale, people will not walk. Street layouts are therefore critical in the design of cities. This paper illustrates how to achieve the best outcomes.

The second part of the paper looks at ways in which non-walkable neighbourhoods can be retrofitted so that they are more walkable. It makes the distinction between the traditional i.e. pre WW2 neighbourhoods and the more recent cul-de-sac neighbourhoods.

It is no coincidence that the historic cities of the world (and the older areas of our new cities) are the most walkable. These street patterns respond to the scale of the city. They expose the topography and in so doing go start to establish a sense of place and with it a sense of identity. They provide multiple choice of movements and hence provide high levels of accessibility. They are intrinsically related to the building typologies and subdivision pattern. They provide views and view shafts hence establishing and clarifying legibility. They are based on the way people see.

Streets are the predominant spatial system of any urban area. They provide 80% of the public domain. If the street layout is not right, no amount of good architecture can make people walk.

Using examples from Europe, Australia and New Zealand, this paper demonstrates how the best street patterns can be achieved and how the built form can reinforce them thereby maximising the potential to get people walking. In identifying these characteristics, the paper questions some of the ways current "walkable neighbourhoods" are implemented. In particular, the failure of new areas to provide a contiguous urban fabric, but rather to impose an isolated grid street pattern in "pods" disconnected from their context.

The second part of the paper investigates ways in which by using traditional principles precincts can be retrofitted to improve walkability.

The increased densities proposed for many older suburbs in New Zealand can present a wonderful opportunity to make these suburbs more walkable. So often however, planning policies have allowed backyards to be stuffed with extra dwellings without understanding the wonderful potential and the inherent relationship between street pattern and density.

In many other parts of the city developed after WW2, suburbs are designed primarily for the car, not the pedestrian. Sight lines are truncated and walking distances long and contorted. There are limited opportunities to make these areas really walkable but improvements can be made.

Designing street layouts to capitalise on the topography provide accessibility, legibility and a sense of place is essential if we are going to encourage people to walk.

Author Profile

Jan's goal as Manager Urban Design at Manukau City Council is to influence planning so that urban areas are considered three dimensional, holistically and that design, not process, forms the basis for urban outcomes.

After returning from London, Jan embarked on the challenge of developing The Pymont Point Urban Design Strategy with the City West Development Corporation (now SHFA). Jan has received numerous Urban Design and Planning awards for planning documents, projects and publications including the Australian Urban Design Award.

As Director of the Urban Design Advisory Service (UDAS) with Planning NSW, she implemented the Premier's Design Quality Programme including SEPP65; The Residential Flat Pattern Book and Model Code and responsible for UDAS's publications Mixed Use Development and Subdivision Design.

Jan has held positions as Director in Local Government in N.S.W.