Living Streets Aotearoa

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Minister for the Environment
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Walkability and the first National Planning Framework

Kia ora Minister,

Living Streets Aotearoa is the New Zealand organisation for people on foot, promoting walking-friendly communities. We are a nationwide organisation with local branches and affiliates throughout New Zealand. We advocate for walkable cities.

Walkable cities have major benefits for people, the environment and the economy.

Walkable neighbourhoods have higher market value.

- Walking is the cheapest mode for individuals, and walking infrastructure is far cheaper to provide and maintain.
- Walkable cities allow households to be car-less, or have fewer cars, or use their cars less. That reduces costs for those households.
- Walkable cities reduce transport disadvantage for those who cannot drive or do not have access to a car.
- Walking as a transport mode is more resilient than other modes– walkers will probably still be able to more easily move around a city affected by flooding, slips or earthquake.
- Walking has a lower environmental footprint than any other mode, both in terms of the walking journey itself and the infrastructure needed for walking.
- Walking connects people to their environment. Walking is easily combined with environmental work, such as picking up litter, weeding, trapping, and watering restoration plantings.

- Where walking is the primary transport mode for short trips, then people are more likely to get to know their neighbours, streets and homes will be safer (because of the presence of people and passive surveillance), and people are more likely to notice and report (or fix) issues in their neighbourhood (e.g. rubbish, vandalism, injured wildlife).
- Regular walking is one of the best forms of exercise, with major physical and mental health benefits. Social isolation will be reduced for those living in a neighbourhood where everyone walks.

The walkability of cities is a function of a myriad of small decisions that are made by road controlling authorities, planners, councils, and property owners. Walkability will be enhanced by:

- Provision of good walking infrastructure, particularly footpaths.
- Walking environments that feel safe and comfortable, including by application of CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) principles and provision of shade and shelter.
- Walking environments and buildings that are accessible, and with adequate provision of seats and toilets.
- Good public transport and cycling infrastructure for longer journeys, and good walking connections to public transport nodes.
- Urban form that provides a complete pedestrian grid. Cul-de-sacs (if they do not include a pedestrian shortcut), large block sizes and private roads force people to walk much longer to get to their destination.
- Short journey distances, achieved through planning, e.g. having shops and schools in the same neighbourhoods as houses, and providing services such as children's play areas scattered throughout the urban area rather than concentrated in one place.

Walkability is reduced where there are missing links in the overall network. A few current examples:

- Tauriko, a neighbourhood in Tauranga, is close to the large Tauranga Crossing shopping complex, but there is no safe road crossing across the State Highway, making the shops completely inaccessible to the residents unless they drive.
- All the new housing in Maungatapere, a small township (now a dormitory suburb) near Whangārei, has private roads (to save the council from maintenance costs). There is no public walking network through the town, other than the edge of the state highways that bisect the town. The town also has no public park, no public toilet, and no children's play area, and to get to the only shop requires residents to cross a busy state highway.
- The minor roads within the Kelburn Campus of Victoria University have been privatised. So that block is now 1.5 km by 0.5 km, with nothing to stop the university restricting access through it. The same has happened in the mall area of Johnsonville, so the roads used to get buses and people to the railway station are only public at their ends, with the middle part of the road now being private land.
- In Blenheim, cul-de-sacs without public walking connections to the riverside walkway means that a resident in a house that is only a few metres from the river may need to walk a kilometre to get to the walkway.

We are heartened to see that the new Natural and Built Environment Bill recognises the need to build good communities, not just control effects on the environment. The system outcomes in section 5 include:

> (*c) well functioning urban and rural areas that are responsive to the diverse and changing needs of people and communities in a way that promotes—*
> *(i) the use and development of land for a variety of activities, including for housing, business use, and primary production; and*
> *(ii) the ample supply of land for development, to avoid inflated urban land prices; and*
> *(ii) housing choice and affordability; and*
> *(ii) an adaptable and resilient urban form with good accessibility for people and communities to social, economic, and cultural opportunities; and*
>
> *(h) enhanced public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes, and rivers:*

We are writing to ask that you ensure the first National Planning Framework (NPF) includes some clear direction on the need to consider walkability when deciding whether an urban area is "well-functioning". A proposal for material that could be included in such direction is set out below.

This includes reference to some standards and measures as optional guidance, but currently there is no single standard that all parties agree is suitable to be used in setting planning conditions relating to walking. We understand that Waka Kotahi is doing further work on that issue. It would be desirable to have an agreed way to measure pedestrian service levels, and agreement on what is acceptable, but this is not essential for the first NPF.

We have included some proposed goals for walking (and public transport) mode share for particular journey lengths. These have been worded as goals rather than requirements, but we would encourage the government to use the Government Policy Statement on land transport to set clear direction on what is an acceptable modal share and how that should be measured.

Proposed material on walkability for inclusion in the first NPF

Walkability in well-functioning urban areas
A well-functioning urban area will be one which is highly walkable. Walkability can be assessed using tools such as Walkscore (walkscore.com).

A walking plan (or planning process) is important to identify:

- the quality of the existing network
- impediments to walking
- impediments to improving walkability (e.g. agency silos, a lack of public land in critical areas, bias in the distribution of public spaces and facilities across the urban area)
- modal share, and
- priorities for active enhancement of walkability.

The plan should help facilitate delivery of outcomes by a wide range of parties, not just road controlling authorities.

Walking infrastructure
To be walkable, the area must have:

- A pedestrian network which is either on public land, or where there is a public walking easement to guarantee use and (if necessary) ability for the public to undertake maintenance of the infrastructure.
- A network that allows users to efficiently access all potential destinations. The network should have a complete grid (including pedestrian shortcuts where roads are cul-de-sacs), and there should be no major barriers to use of parts of the grid (e.g. difficult to cross highways). Block lengths should be small (generally no greater than 200 m).
- A core network that is fully accessible, even if not all streets and walkways are able to be used by a wheelchair, with a timetable to make virtually all parts of the network accessible to people using wheelchairs – this means that the width, gradient and cross slope must all be suitable for wheelchairs. A fully accessible network also requires the installation of pedestrian prioritised accessible road crossings. The absence of these is a huge barrier for those who are unable to determine a safe time to cross.
- Pedestrian infrastructure which is designed and maintained to deliver appropriate service levels for the likely or desired use. The NZTA Pedestrian Planning and Design Guide and its replacement, the Pedestrian Network Guidance – which is currently being completed – provides guidance on how to design appropriate pedestrian infrastructure.
- Lighting and other measures to ensure that walking feels safe, including at night.
- Sufficient redundancy to ensure that the network will always be useable (e.g. more than one pedestrian crossing of a major river).

Journey lengths and modal share
The design of the urban area should reduce journey lengths, particularly for frequent journeys (e.g. from homes to schools, from homes to supermarkets). Dormitory suburbs

with no local facilities should be avoided as far as possible. The number of short journeys can be increased and reliance on cars reduced by reducing sprawl, by placing denser housing near town centres and public transport hubs and by making it easier to site appropriate businesses in primarily residential areas. Length of journey is strongly influenced by block size and/or the availability of shortcuts.

The design, maintenance and location of walking infrastructure should encourage the use of walking as the primary mode for short journeys. A walking modal share of at least 90% for journeys less than 1.5 kilometres should be achieved.

The design, maintenance and location of walking infrastructure should encourage the use of walking as a mode for medium length journeys (up to 30 minutes walking time), with a modal share by walking and cycling of at least 70% achieved for regular trips of that length, such as commuting and access to education. There should be attractive walking corridors connecting the key parts of the urban area (e.g. between suburbs and the CBD, between public transport hubs and major industrial areas).

The design, maintenance and location of walking and public transport infrastructure should facilitate the use of public transport as the primary mode of transport for longer journeys, by providing efficient and attractive walking routes to stops and stations, and safe and comfortable environments at stops and stations. A modal share for walking, cycling and public transport of at least 60% for transport journeys within urban areas should be achieved.

Access to services and opportunities

A well-functioning urban area will provide attractive walking opportunities to allow access to natural areas, to encourage recreational walking, and to encourage connection to the local environment and cultural heritage. No important public feature (e.g. beach, historic place) or service (e.g. library, museum) should be difficult to access on foot.

A well-functioning urban area will have a range of public facilities that are accessible by walking, including green spaces, sheltered sitting areas, indoor spaces for reading and working (e.g. libraries), and children's play areas. Design of urban areas will encourage the use of public spaces and social mixing, and also provide spaces for use by people for whom the home or work environment is inadequate or unsafe. Where there is denser housing or crowding within houses, the design of public spaces to supplement private spaces will be particularly important.

Planning and investment will seek to ensure that all New Zealanders have access to important services, such as food supplies (e.g. supermarkets), pharmacies, schools, medical facilities, library services, and postal services, without needing to own or use a car.

A well-functioning urban area, including rural hubs, will be designed to encourage social mixing in public spaces and reduce social isolation. That will include the application of CPTED design principles for public spaces, the provision of seats, toilets and other facilities to make public spaces accessible for all users, and community investment to enhance the attractiveness of public spaces (e.g. through public art, gardens, play equipment).

Implementation approaches
Walkability may be developed over time, as opportunities arise. In considering whether to acquire or require walking routes, esplanade reserves, etc, the acquisition or requirement should be considered even if it would not immediately create a useful addition to the network. For example, a continuous walking route along the coast or a river may only be achieved by multiple acquisitions over a number of years. Failure to use opportunities could slow or prevent achievement of the long-term goal.

Walking routes do not need to be on public land, but where private roads, walkways over private land, or shortcuts through private buildings are being relied on or core parts of the network, there must be a legal interest in land or other effective legal instrument in place to ensure ongoing accessibility by the public.

In making decisions on the allocation and design of public space (including transport corridor space), priority should be given to:

- delivering public benefits over private benefits (e.g. providing loading zones rather than commuter parking spaces; providing public green space rather than allowing incorporation of road space into private gardens)
- achieving desirable modal shift (from cars to public transport, from motorised vehicles to active modes)
- enhancing public health outcomes, and
- encouraging the use of public spaces and social mixing.

Privatisation of public space should be avoided or reversible.

In making decisions on the use and design of public space, delivering multiple outcomes from each area is desirable. For example, a water utility corridor could also provide a walking route and biodiversity habitat.

Involving users in management of space can enhance the range of outcomes achieved and reduce anti-social activities and public costs (e.g. a community restoration group could carry out planting and maintenance to reduce weed control costs and deliver biodiversity benefits, with their presence and activities also reducing dumping and litter). Silos within public bodies and outsourcing can impede these sorts of multi-outcome initiatives, while placemaking plans can support them.

Ngā mihi nui
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