

Living Streets Aotearoa



www.livingstreets.org.nz

Making Northland Accessible - Submission to Whangārei District Council

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SUBMITTER DETAILS

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Introduction

- 1 **Living Streets Aotearoa** is the New Zealand organisation for people on foot. We are a nationwide not-for-profit organisation with local branches and affiliates throughout New Zealand that advocates for walkable communities and promotes the significant social and economic benefits of walkable environments.
- 2 Living Streets Aotearoa exists because the diverse needs and aspirations of people on foot are often overlooked. Walking is not consistently or fully integrated into decision-making in transport, urban design, public health and community development planning.
- 3 The focus of Living Streets Aotearoa means this submission largely relates to physical mobility accessibility in Northland, however it is noted that wider accessibility issues include consideration of those who have sensory, cognitive, neurological accessibility needs including noise and other sensitivities and these accessibility issues should also be assessed in accessibility audits.

Benefits of walking

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

Equity

Walking is the cheapest mode of transport for individuals.

Suitable walking infrastructure reduces transport disadvantage for those who cannot drive or do not have access to a car, particularly those of our communities who are young or old.

Economy

Walking infrastructure is far cheaper to provide and maintain than for other transport modes, and walking encourages more local economic transactions.

Walkable neighborhoods generally have higher market values.

Resilience

Walking has higher resilience compared to other transport modes, and walkers are often still able to easily move around a city affected by flooding, slips or earthquakes.

Environment

Walking has a lower environmental footprint than any other mode, both in terms of the walking journey itself and the infrastructure needed for walking.

Community

Where walking is the primary transport mode for short trips, people are more likely to know their neighbours, so 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 such as infrastructure maintenance and graffiti.

Health

Regular walking is one of the best forms of exercise, with major physical and mental health benefits, and social isolation will be reduced for those living in a neighbourhood where everyone walks.

Submission

5 New developments

Many public projects are designed and built without accessibility audits, and this can result in access to buildings, parks and other public spaces being difficult or impossible for some people. Access into and through to destinations including by public transport rather than just building entrances should be audited.

Recommendation 1: All Local Authority and Government development projects in Northland are required to have an accessibility audit at design, construction and completion phases that includes access routes to these buildings.

6 Agreements for use of public space including roads

Council is able to allocate footpath space under the Alfresco Policy and other agreements including with e-scooter providers. The Alfresco Policy requires a minimum 'Walkway Zone'

width of 1.75m. This width is inconsistent with a recommended minimum 'through route' width of 3m for main streets in pedestrian districts in the NZTA:WK Pedestrian Network Guidance¹

Inadequate footpath widths degrade the experience and amenity for walkers and are often not wide enough for all days and times in the week. Pedestrian through routes may not be adequately monitored to ensure the width is preserved. Other activities including rubbish collection may further reduce the footpath width so that people with mobility devices may be forced to find alternative routes on the road. Allocation of space for signage, cafe dining and other activities should be kerb side and not adjacent to the building line which is the continuous accessible path of travel giving orientation, navigation cues and access to buildings.

Recommendation 2: All applications to Local Authorities in Northland for use of footpath areas including for signs, alfresco dining and storage should comply with Pedestrian Network Guidance provided by NZTA:WK and should be accompanied by a detailed accessibility audit that includes permanent structures such as lamp posts and other activities including rubbish collection.

7 Vehicle crossings

Many large commercial developments including supermarkets in Whangārei have wide entries where cars are not prevented or discouraged from blocking the continuous accessible pedestrian path by any physical means, road markings or signage. This removes pedestrian priority for use of the footpath and creates a busy intersection with uncertain rules. Many drivers 'read' these driveway layouts as giving them right of way so that they do not stop for pedestrians.

Recommendation 3: The design standards of driveway crossings including for commercial properties in Northland are reviewed to improve pedestrian accessibility and should include dominance of the footpath across the entrance and signs to enforce the legal duty for drivers to give way to pedestrians using them.

8 Walking Information

Local Authorities usually have insufficient information on the universal activity of walking to inform good decision making, and infrastructure decisions including sizing of footpaths are often made with inadequate information.

Recommendation 4: That the Northland Transport Alliance conducts sufficient research on pedestrian activity every 2 years to form a basis for good planning decisions.

9 Dedicated pedestrian staff in Local Authorities

Staff working in Roding Departments have in the past been more likely to have an affinity with cars rather than pedestrians and accessibility issues, and even now the numbers of staff managing the activity shared by all (walking and assisted walking) is unbalanced by the numbers of staff managing vehicle activities.

Recommendation 5: That the Northland Transport Alliance increases the number of staff involved in other modes including walking, and supports these staff with training to improve knowledge of walking and accessibility issues.

¹<https://www.nzta.govt.nz/walking-cycling-and-public-transport/walking/walking-standards-and-guidelines/pedestrian-network-guidance/>

10 Shared Paths and 'the third lane'

Allocation of road space needs to take account of all users, and existing footpaths are generally undersized and do not have sufficient capacity to provide for additional activities. In some urban environments, a separate lane may need to be provided for cycle and e-scooter modes.

Shared paths are problematic for many including those who are visually and hearing impaired, and many cyclists and those on e-scooters operate at speeds which makes walkers feel unsafe. Shared use should be rare and well assessed for safety and amenity issues.

Recommendation 6: Footpaths should be used exclusively for walking and use of mobility devices by disabled people and should provide a safe separated environment for these users. Provision for other modes including cycling and e-scooters should be incorporated in the road through road design including the creation of a separate lane, speed limits and other mechanisms.

11 Accessibility for all

Where accessibility is provided to meet the needs of wheelchair and other assisted walking users but not able-bodied people, routes can be unnecessarily extended. An Auckland example is access to Sylvia Park train station from Carbine Road where provision is not made for able-bodied people by stairs or a roadside footpath which hampers walking and encourages unsafe walking behaviour.

Recommendation 7: When considering resource consents and planning public projects, accessibility for all walking types should be considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. We welcome any further communications regarding accessibility issues.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Rawson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Robin Rawson