

Living Streets Aotearoa



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Submission from Wellington Living Streets to Let's Get Wellington Moving on Golden Mile options

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General

Of the three options Living Streets Aotearoa favours option 3 with elements from option 2 as well. We support trial options where feasible and staging of improvements if this proves easier for implementation.

We strongly support the Golden Mile as the key public transport spine route and the main central city walking route. Any option approved must improve the current situation and support increased use of both walking and bus use. Living Streets supports removal of general traffic along the Golden Mile.

The improvement of the Golden Mile for bus travel and pedestrian use have been well canvassed over many years and have strong support for solutions such as these three options from many Wellingtonians.

Currently the Golden Mile is also used by cars and other private vehicles including bikes and scooters and other micromobility. We support removal of these vehicles with a clear understanding of where the preferred or best routes for these vehicles are. Private vehicle use around the Golden Mile should support access to it, but not travel along it.

The Golden Mile is:

- a major job hub area, so requires excellent accessibility to jobs.
- the main retail centre for Wellington, so retail support such as ensuring goods delivery is essential.
- a significant public space for people living in and near the central city, so needs to provide public space for people to use in many ways.
- the hub of the bus network in the city and beyond, so needs to provide the environment for efficient, convenient public transport.

This means that the final option must:

1. Improve the bus service along the Golden Mile to the highest degree possible, to meet climate change objectives, provide a great and improved service to Wellingtonians, and encourage the maximum number of people to use public transport over private vehicle use. This will need:
 - A consistent standard of amenity and service along the entire Golden Mile
 - Bus stops that provide overtaking space for buses where possible
 - Bus stops sited to meet the needs of users as the primary goal
 - Emergency vehicles access to the Golden Mile, and for cleaning and street services. These access points can also be used by buses to exit the Golden Mile if there is some unusual situation (such as recently a bomb scare or burst bus tyre)
 - Separate spaces for buses and bikes.

2. Improve the pedestrian experience along the entire Golden Mile and address crowding.
 - This means a high amenity and standard of footpath must be used consistently along the entire Golden Mile. We suggest that a better surface is provided instead of the slippery, uneven and high-maintenance brick pavers. A distinctive Wellington design is needed that aids wayfinding.
 - Traffic light phasing should support bus and pedestrian movement – bus pre-emption at lights, a pedestrian cycle on each phase with no requirement to call (no beg button), the use of smart technologies to facilitate matching the amount of time for pedestrians to cross to that needed, and for bus movement
 - Pedestrians and bikes should not share space, and bike paths should not come between pedestrians and bus stops
 - Close all side streets to general traffic as in Option 3, plus Willeston St; and at all remaining intersections with the Golden Mile (whichever option is chosen) there should be pedestrian crossings on platforms, following pedestrian desire lines

3. Improve public space so that it is attractive to a wider range of people including kids and older folks, and suitable for people living in this area.
 - Public space is retained (not privatised for business use alone, such as is happening in Cuba Mall and on parts of Courtenay Place), and is attractive in both day and night settings to a wide range of people
 - It reflects our maritime environment, so provides shade and shelter and caters for prevailing winds
 - It provides a distinctly Wellington feel incorporating mana whenua design elements, and supports wayfinding
 - It provides space for kids and older folks. There are no play spaces along the Golden Mile but lots of potential for them. Play spaces could include chess boards, hopscotch, etc. There are lots of sheltered sunny spots for sitting and being part of the street community, such as the disused bus stop near Stout St.
 - The use for private purposes needs to be better managed than currently: there are wide footpaths that are unusable due to clutter from sandwich boards, services and poles, chairs and tables, even parking. At the very least the WCC Footpath Management Policy should be followed.

- Surfaces differentiated by colour or surface treatment so that bus and pedestrian space is clear without looking like a main road (as Manners St does now).
4. Support use of side streets for accessibility parking, loading zones, hire vehicle and taxi parking, bike and motorbike parking.
 5. Support development with business of suitable solutions for loading and freight movements outside times that will cause disruption to bus services.
 6. Clearly identify the strategic bike network and how it connects with the Golden Mile
 7. Clearly identify routes for car and private vehicle users from one side of town to the other (e.g. Boulcott St to Victoria St or Kent Terrace, Brooklyn to Thorndon)

Strategic bike network

The bike network needs to be clearly outlined and how it will interact with the Golden Mile. Our two key principles with regard to routes for bikes, ebikes and micromobility devices such as scooters are that:

1. they should travel on safe, separated routes, not on footpaths.
2. such routes should not be placed so that they come between alighting and boarding bus passengers and the footpath.

Taking the principle that bikes and micromobility should have their own safe space, it is unclear if a strategic commuting bike network meets these requirements along all of the Golden Mile.

We note there is more detail on the car network options than for bikes.

Short list options analysis report

The problem statement diminishes the impact of general traffic on both bus reliability and pedestrian DSI along the Golden Mile, and instead focuses on bus stop spacing (p 9). The statement doesn't address the method of boarding the bus by the front door only causing delay at stops. The analysis of numbers of passengers at each stop doesn't identify what an optimal number of passengers is and the impact this has on dwell time at each stop or bus stop siting. What will happen when more passengers wait at fewer stops? The report notes the "Bus capacity limited by size of bus stops" (p33), but the bus stop capacity issue does not seem to be addressed, for instance what is the optimal bus stop size from an operational point of view. It is unclear how proposals will affect platooning of buses.

The rationale for reducing stops needs more analysis. We support providing the best service to the most people in order to increase public transport use.

The bus stop walk catchment analysis is simplistic and does not take into account the difficulty of access such as having to cross roads to access a stop, nor the needs of users who cannot proceed at the walking speed needed to meet the "5-minute walk" criterion. The analysis seems to suggest that all options reduce the employment and population catchment within a 5-minute walk of each stop (p70). To increase bus patronage the walk catchment for employment and population should be increased not decreased.

We support a better service for passengers, which will require a more detailed analysis of both bus stop placement and other bus operating parameters as well, such as outlined above. For instance, will all door boarding be considered, which would improve loading at each stop?

The greenhouse gas emissions have only been accounted for private vehicles (p49). What of reductions in GHG from improved bus performance or if more people walk? These should be included in the next analysis.

- Spatial analysis report – urban amenity opportunities

There is a significant omission of the links from Courtenay Place to Mt Victoria (p 79).

The key connectors seem to refer to vehicle traffic in some places not pedestrian or buses on some streets, yet Willis St analysis shows the walk connectors through some buildings but not south on a main Brooklyn walk route. Lambton Quay is missing many walk connector routes through buildings that should be included, such as the routes between the Wellington City Council building and Capital on the Quay, and Farmers Lane.

The report identifies potential commercial use of public space but not existing use. The use of space under the verandahs should form part of the clear accessible footway. Commercial use of public space constantly changes and should be an extra where there is space and not considered the main use of extra public space created.

We are surprised that the analysis does not consider any of the Golden Mile footpath as crowded currently (p170). This is despite the experience of many pedestrians that these footpaths are crowded, with single-file walking in a number of places. We note that Courtenay Place figures are based on day-time use, which is currently not the peak time. This affects the benefit assessment for footpath widening and more detailed study would be beneficial.

Comments on specific streets and intersections

Courtenay Place

- Should include separation of outbound bus stops by destination (as currently northbound on Lambton Quay at Bowen St, which arrangement should be retained there) to make buses easier to catch and reduce both bus and passenger congestion, i.e. separate stops for routes to the east via Oriental Pde/Majoribanks St/bus tunnel, and for routes to the south via the Basin
- Support a more people-friendly environment with less drinking and more local service shops
- Removal of the current parking area and redesign of the area, including the toilets, at the east end. Some green space would be welcome.
- Child-focused activities
- Connections for pedestrians to Kent/Cambridge Terrace and Mt Victoria, and Tory/Taranaki St to Mt Cook are important

Tory St

- Support removal of general traffic here as it will significantly improve bus movement and pedestrian amenity (even just preventing turning movements will be better)
- Could be part of bike network and allow bike access through to waterfront
- Alternative routes for car and other private vehicle users need to be clear (applies to all places where such traffic will be diverted from existing routes)

Taranaki St

- Will there be a separate turning lane for buses only into Manners St?
- Removal of general and turning traffic will provide the opportunity to significantly improve pedestrian crossing here, including reinstating pedestrian refuges and putting the crossings on platforms, on desire lines, with pedestrian refuges.

Cuba St

- Support increasing pedestrianisation of all Cuba St, including raised platform (or preferably closure to vehicles) at Dixon St. This should be a key walking network north-south connection.

Victoria St – Manners St

- What is happening here – traffic lights need to favour bus movement. Will the bus turning lane be retained?
- Crossings should be on platforms, on desire lines

Manners St

- Manners St needs to look more pedestrian friendly – suggest at grade surface differentiated by colour or surface treatment so that bus and pedestrian space is clear (and applies throughout the Golden Mile)

Willis – Boulcott – Manners St intersection

- We would be interested in options to reduce general traffic further at this intersection with retention of bus through traffic. This area worked well during the recent closure due to sewage works. This would considerably simplify this intersection.
- Crossings should be on footpath-level platforms (preferably the whole intersection should be on a platform)

Willis – Willeston St intersection

- Willeston St should also be blocked off and it is unclear why it has been left open. This will complicate the traffic light phasing at this intersection. It is a potential space for a bus stop at this end of Willis St to pair with the Stewart Dawson corner stop.

Lambton Quay

- It is unclear what happens at the Railway Station end which should provide an easy flow through to the main bus stop and access to both bus and train. Bowen/Molesworth Streets need to support continuation of bus and pedestrian movements.
- The slip lane on Bowen St should be removed
- We support retaining the street trees and recommend any new ones should be Wellington natives that provide shelter and shade (kowhai, coprosma repens - taupata and c. robusta for instance).
- The transport link to the Cable Car needs to be clear and used as an opportunity to show that there is public transport access that does not require use of Golden Mile bus routes.

About Living Streets

Living Streets Aotearoa is New Zealand's national walking and pedestrian organisation, providing a positive voice for people on foot and working to promote walking friendly planning and development around the country. Our vision is "More people choosing to walk more often and enjoying public places". The objectives of Living Streets Aotearoa are:

- 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 including walking surfaces, traffic flows, speed and safety
- to advocate for greater representation of pedestrian concerns in national, regional and urban land use and transport planning.

For more information, please see: www.livingstreets.org.nz