

Living Streets Aotearoa



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Submission from Living Streets to Let's Get Wellington Moving on Mass rapid transit options

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General

Living Streets supports the proposal for provision of a mass rapid transit system for Wellington: it is essential to overcome the bus congestion on the Golden Mile, future proof for increased population, speed up the shift to more sustainable travel modes, and to provide a modern and more pleasant option to travel.

The link between the Golden Mile and MRT proposals is not clearly made. It is hard to see how the MRT proposals address some of the fundamental issues that LGWM is meant to solve. Similarly it appears the link between MRT and the bike network is not well made.

Overall we prefer elements of Option 4 as it has the lowest carbon impact, achieves good outcomes, and has the potential to be added to if necessary in the future. We support urgent action on the Wellington bus priority plan so that an assessment of improvements to the eastern suburbs can be factored into the mass transit proposals.

We support light rail as it provides most capacity to move people and has the safest and most pleasant interactions with pedestrians.

The mass transit route is the key decision needed now:

1 Golden Mile

A key issue for Let's Get Wellington Moving is bus congestion along the Golden Mile and inability to increase bus numbers to alleviate crowding on buses on that route. Two main public transport spines have been identified as needed on the Golden Mile and the Quays. Removal of buses from the Golden Mile should be an option for LGWM MRT proposals.

We suggest that a light rail route along the **Golden Mile** is considered and a second spine route along the Quays for buses. The reasons to do this are

- A key issue for LGWM to solve is bus congestion on the Golden Mile
- Most passenger destinations are along the Golden Mile
- The walk catchment is bigger when MRT is routed along the GM and provides more growth opportunity to a wider area
- Light rail has the best interactions for a pedestrian-friendly GM outcome
- Light rail is accessible for all and provides a predictable path

- A quick journey along the Golden Mile is possible when all other vehicles have been removed as is anticipated with the GM project and there will be much less need for traffic-light holdups
- Trams have previously run along the GM
- Works well with initial focus on railway station to hospital route
- GM is more protected from sea level changes and other hazards so more resilient long term
- Two public spine routes in the central city can be trialled without significant works to determine what works best in Wellington.

The Quays route is suitable for a secondary spine for buses and provides for flexibility in secondary bus routes

- The required changes to pedestrian services to mitigate the increased walk from the Quays to the destinations most people want to access have not been addressed. The impact on pedestrian journeys has not been fully assessed. So while vehicle speeds may be higher on the Quays individuals' journey times will be greater as they need to walk further.
- The Quays route halves residential and business walk catchments, and will remain a multi-modal corridor with a higher need for traffic management such as traffic lights.
- Whether the Quays is used for buses or light rail, all stops should be located on the western side adjacent to the footpath for maximum ease of use and safety for passengers/ pedestrians. Crossing this road to reach public transport would add walk journey time and prioritise private vehicle use.

2 Taranaki Street vs Kent and Cambridge Terraces

MRT may be better located along Taranaki Street initially opening up new areas for development and leaving Kent and Cambridge Terraces for buses as the link through the Hataitai bus tunnel remains, providing for greater catchment across both routes.

3 East and South public transport needs

Both the eastern and southern suburbs need improved higher capacity public transport to meet current and future needs. MRT solutions are needed for both the south for its high development potential, and the east for its current high all-day two-way travel demand. Determining the public transport routes is the key decision needed now and can be expanded to provide light rail on both south and east routes in the future.

4 Road and private vehicle options

No analysis is provided of the impact on State Highway 1 travel in these proposals. Options to improve liveability in the city centre through rerouting SH1 is needed. We recommend consideration to make Karo Drive through Arras Tunnel to the Basin Reserve two way by repurposing existing road width. This would remove the Vivian Street severance that significantly impacts sustainable travel north to south through the city, and would provide additional traffic calming benefits to SH1 traffic.

Pedestrian interface

MRT mode

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) versus light rail/ tram

The pedestrian experience with light rail is better particularly as with fixed rail the route is predictable. The light rail vehicles have a larger capacity so future proof key routes better.

MRT Stop spacing

Passenger amenity, service and reliability should be prioritised when considering stop spacing: a key purpose of public transport is to provide a great service with predictable

journey times more competitive than private vehicle use. A 400m spacing between high quality stops should be the maximum.

It is essential that passengers are prioritised with any MRT system so most people will use the service. Walkability in the walk catchments must be significantly improved to achieve the mode change desired with dedicated separated footpaths and much improved pedestrian crossing amenity.

MRT Stop location

Currently MRT is proposed to run along the middle of the roads to avoid 'friction'.

We recommend MRT stops are located adjacent to the western-side footpath on the Quays because it is closer to the destinations people will want to access. All other vehicle lanes should be located in the middle of the road including bike/ micromobility lanes.

On the Golden Mile we expect that it will be a MRT and pedestrian priority area and there will be no other vehicles for much of the Golden Mile distance.

We are concerned that there is no detail on how access to MRT stops will increase the passenger catchment at each stop. Pedestrians waiting 2 minutes at each road crossing to get to the Quays route, for instance, would be a risky disincentive to use any PT service there.

Tunnels

We support option 4 with no new tunnels as the first step to transform Wellington transport. New tunnels can too easily be repurposed for private vehicle use and are expensive at great environmental cost in terms of both local environmental effects and embedded emissions. In particular, the diagonal vehicle and public transport tunnels proposed under Options 1 and 2 would have very high embedded emissions.

Pedestrian tunnel

Other easy options to improve the walk journey from Hataitai and better located for Hataitai and Mt Victoria pedestrians would be to trial free bus rides through the Hataitai tunnel.

Consideration should be given to relocating any new walking tunnel to run alongside the Hataitai bus tunnel as this is better located to encourage Hataitai residents to walk the short distance on a direct route to the city centre. This route works well with school children using public buses and attending secondary schools around the Basin Reserve now.

An improved walking route from Hataitai to Newtown is also required including a new pedestrian crossing of Ruahine St at Wellington Road.

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