

Living Streets Aotearoa



New Zealand Walking Conference 2006

Getting There on Foot in NZ Cities and Towns – Taking the Next Steps

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ABSTRACT

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Walking as a transport activity has been declining in recent decades as auto-oriented transport systems have become prevalent. This paper explores the ways in which this 'automobilisation' of our cities has had far-reaching consequences for urban social and family life, for the spatial and temporal rhythms of everyday life, for urban civility, and for the relationship between people and their cities, leading to increasing 'placelessness'. Recent emphasis which has been placed upon increasing walking is argued to work against these trends, by improving social inclusion and cohesion, and by contributing to urban civility and the creation of 'authentic' places. These ideas were explored at a series of four focus groups in Auckland in 2005, which explored the pervasiveness of the automobile in urban life, and the ways in which walking has become marginalised as a transport mode, despite its popularity as a leisure pursuit. Perceptions of different travel modes, especially walking, were also examined. Results of the focus groups showed that many barriers to walking exist, and these are shown to be highly complex. These barriers involve auto dominance, traffic danger, personal security, distance and time, retail design, weather, topography, nightfall, seasonality, dogs, car ownership, habitual travel patterns, the compromising of travel preferences for other household members, and whether housing-employment-transport decisions are made concurrently. Perceptions of the car, as a facilitator of leisure, education, employment, family and social life, as well as being a means to show love and concern for others, contribute to the continued low use of walking as a transport mode. However, focus group results also revealed that many positive perceptions of walking exist. Walking is seen as an enjoyable recreational pursuit in many parts of Auckland, as a healthy and sustainable activity, and as a facilitator of local social interaction and community cohesion. Moreover, the research revealed that there is resistance to car use in Auckland, indicating that there are significant opportunities for change.