

Living Streets Aotearoa



Submission from Living Streets Aotearoa

on the draft New Zealand Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy

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About Living Streets Aotearoa

Living Streets Aotearoa (LSA) is a national advocacy organisation with a vision of “More people choosing to walk more often and enjoying public places – young and old, fast and slow, walking, sitting and standing, commuting, shopping, between appointments, for exercise, for leisure and for pleasure.”

The objectives of LSA 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 e.g. 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

Main points of the submission

The main points of Living Streets Aotearoa's submission are:

1. To address climate change issues, and in particular to reduce carbon emissions, there needs to be a modal shift away from car-dependent transport to more sustainable transport modes
2. Positive incentives are needed to encourage a move to more sustainable transport modes
3. Walking is the cheapest, healthiest and most environmentally sustainable transport mode and is an integral component of the majority of public transport trips
4. To encourage more walking, steps need to be taken to improve walking environments to make them safer, pleasanter and more convenient
5. Land use planning needs to be directed towards the development of walkable communities with good access to public transport
6. Addressing climate change issues through an increase in walking has flow on benefits for the health and prosperity of people and communities

Conclusion

In light of issues of climate change, present trends in walking, energy security considerations and with a view to social, environmental and economic sustainability and health issues, the government needs to provide strategies that significantly increase the modal share of walking.

Living Streets Aotearoa urges the government to show leadership and vision in ensuring that all strategies provide for and strongly promote walking and other sustainable transport systems for the country. This will produce a reduction in carbon emissions, an increase in economic and social prosperity, a healthy environment and an equitable and vibrant society.

1. Addressing climate change issues

Climate Change is the most serious threat to our society, our environment and the global economy in the twenty-first century. Only a concerted and integrated international effort can now prevent very serious damage to people and the environment.

As the Prime Minister has stated, “issues around sustainability and climate change have become the compelling issues of our times”, and “without a commitment to greater sustainability... we risk not only damaging our own environment, but also exposing our economy to significant risk”¹.

New Zealand needs to address the issues around sustainability and climate change immediately. Targets need to be set for a reduction in total carbon emissions, and actions leading towards these targets need to be implemented as soon as possible.

Transport fuel is the largest source of energy related emissions and tackling it is a priority. Transport fuel will always be needed, but there must be a move toward minimising fuel use, and using less polluting, renewable fuels. Fuel use can be cut by:

- encouraging the use of rail and shipping for the movement of freight,
- encouraging public transport, walking and cycling for the movement of people
- land use planning and urban design which support sustainable and active transport modes.

In spite of the messages coming from the highest levels of government about the importance of addressing the issues of climate change and reducing carbon emissions, there is still a lack of integration between the work of different ministries and departments, and a lack of understanding at a regional and local level about how to plan for, fund and implement changes to “business as usual”.

The Land Transport Management Act is too weak regarding climate change. While it is supposed to improve social and environmental responsibility in land transport funding, planning and management, it does not send out a strong enough message to regional and local councils about the need to plan proactively for reduced carbon emissions.

For example, in the Greater Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy the emphasis is on road building, with the majority of investment in new transport capacity to be spent on large roading projects, with a projected 1%

¹ Rt. Hon Helen Clark. *Prime Minister's Statement to Parliament*, 13th February 2007
<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewDocument.aspx?DocumentID=28357> Accessed 15/2/07

decrease in modal share of walking over the next decade. The strategy predicts that greenhouse gas emissions will rise. Rather than seeing greenhouse gas emissions as an unfortunate by-product of the strategy, greenhouse gas emissions reduction should be a key objective and the actions of the strategy should be aligned with this national obligation. A “business as usual” approach like this is unacceptable and inconsistent with the Government’s sustainability and climate change commitments and strategic direction, and will expose the region to unnecessary economic risk.

Living Streets Aotearoa strongly urges the government to show vision and leadership, and to send clear and unequivocal messages to decision makers at all levels that increased investment in new walking, cycling and public transport options is a matter of urgency.

2. Incentives to encourage walking

At present, in transport planning walking is either totally invisible or lumped in with cycling. The sustainable transport debate tends to focus on the allocation of funding between roading and public transport, with walking and cycling being considered optional, add-on extras rather than an integral part of the transport mix.

For example, Land Transport New Zealand subsidy levels to local authorities do not encourage the building of more footpaths, and footpath maintenance is not even eligible for funding. Wellington’s Inner City Bypass received 100% Central Government funding (with additional local funding for heritage preservation) since it is a part of State Highway 1, but for a Safer Roads project to deal with area-wide accessibility and safety, the subsidy is around 50%. The 53% subsidy for Councils to develop walking strategies is helpful, but not all councils are availing themselves of it and subsequently are not being audited against them.

Walking is an important activity to promote in light of government’s vision for a sustainable future for the country. Investment in walking, cycling and public transport options needs to be prioritised ahead of large roading projects that simply perpetuate an unsustainable dependence on private motor vehicles. The present funding regime does not offer the right incentives and does not send a clear message that to cut carbon emissions, investment should be in infrastructure and measures to increase the modal share of walking along with other more sustainable transport modes.

Many businesses offer travel allowances of up to 70c/km for the use of private vehicles for work purposes, but very few offer allowances for walking or cycling, or even tickets for public transport. The Higher Salaries commission refused to introduce any mileage allowance for walking or cycling despite unanimous submissions from the Wellington City Council in the past.

New facilities and developments are built with acres of car parking, but few, if any, cycle stands, and pleasant, safe pedestrian access is rarely planned as a priority. Conferences and meetings are advertised with information about car parking facilities and how to get there by car, but rarely is information given about how to get there by public transport, or where bicycle stands are available.

We are all pedestrians some of the time, and could be more of the time given the right conditions and incentives. Introducing measures which show that an increase in walking and cycling are necessary for the reduction of carbon emissions would help in changing attitudes which are firmly wedded to car use.

3. Walking, the invisible mode with many benefits

Walking suffers from a lack of statistics about the number of people walking, and the number of walking trips undertaken. Motor vehicle counts are routinely carried out, and, to a lesser extent, cycle counts. Pedestrian counts are done less often.

However, walking constitutes an important transport mode for many people every day. While statistics such as those produced in the 2001 Census indicate, for example, that around 17% of all trips made within the Wellington region are walked, the real figure is likely to be higher. Many trips are multi-modal and surveys such as the Census only record the part of a multi-modal trip that takes the longest time or distance. Walking often makes up a substantial part of most public transport trips between railway station or bus stop and home or work but this may not be recorded. Therefore the number of people walking is underestimated, and the importance of walking as a critical element of most trips is under-appreciated.

Most councils hold no information about percentages of children walking to school, and analysis of numbers walking to school doesn't include the follow-on journeys by the caregivers who have walked with their children to school and continued their own journey on foot.

The lack of information about the true level of walking means that the importance of walking to national objectives, such as reduction of carbon emissions, is often underplayed or ignored.

There are numerous benefits of walking including :

- environmental (reduced greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions)
- social (being active and feeling good, enhanced social cohesion, higher quality of life)

- economic (reduced congestion, reduced fuel consumption, reduced cost of infrastructure)
- health benefits (increased physical activity reduces risk of obesity and related diseases).

Walking is the most accessible form of sustainable transport, that can be accessed by people when they want, where they want and without needing any special equipment apart from a pair of shoes. Young people who are not old enough to drive, older people who no longer drive, people with disabilities who are not able to drive, and people who cannot afford to drive, all rely on walking as a means of independent transport.

Walking is a gentle, effective way to exercise, without having to go to a gym, a sports field or a special location. Incorporating walking into the daily routine by walking to work, or to school, or to the shops means that the exercise is more likely to happen regularly. The health benefits of walking are many. In our increasingly sedentary society walking helps prevent obesity, diabetes, heart disease, depression and stress, amongst other ailments.

The cost to the walker is minimal compared to the cost of any other form of transport. Todd Littman² has calculated the annualized cost of transport for a car as \$8000 (including roads, fuel, parking and vehicle), public transport as \$800 (including roads, fares and subsidies) and walking as \$80 (including paths and shoes). The cost of building and maintaining roads is much higher per kilometer than the cost of building and maintaining footpaths.

Walking is an essential part of the vast majority of public transport trips. People are reluctant to leave their cars at home and use public transport, unless the service provided is cheap, convenient, frequent and reliable. However, even if the best public transport is available, people will not use it if to get to their bus or train they have to walk along dangerous, badly lit, poorly maintained, circuitous, dirty and unattractive footpaths and wait at graffiti smeared, dilapidated, isolated bus shelters or train stations. To increase the modal share of public transport, walking environments need to be of a high standard.

The more people there are walking, the more sociable, friendly, safe and non polluted streets become, thus inducing even more people to walk. More people walking means fewer vehicles on the roads, less congestion, smoother trips, fuel savings and a reduction in carbon emissions.

The economic benefits of more people walking include less demand for road construction and improvements, with fiscal savings. Walking infrastructure is also comparatively cheaper than roading construction.

² <http://www.vtpi.org/wwclimate.pdf>

While there is also often a perception that most shopping in city centres is undertaken with shoppers driving to the shops, studies have indicated that people walking and cycling or using public transport constitutes the majority of shoppers. For example, a study of the Acland Street retail area in Melbourne, Australia found that only 26% of expenditure was driven into the area and 57% walked into the area³. Hence there is considerable evidence to suggest that the provision of excellent pedestrian facilities have significant positive economic outcomes.

Improving Walking environments

People are encouraged to walk when it is safe, pleasant, and convenient to do so. No-one wants to walk alongside multi lanes of noisy, polluting vehicles and have to wait long periods at traffic lights to cross, or have to detour a long way to cross safely.

Pedestrian advocates face the argument that slowing traffic by reducing speed, creating more crossings or introducing pedestrian priority phasing at traffic lights increases congestion, therefore increases emissions and therefore is environmentally unsound. However, this is a short-term and narrow view point. Making walking more attractive encourages more people to walk which has benefits not only for walkers, but for the vehicles remaining on less congested roads. There are also mathematical models that show greater throughput and smoother flow of traffic traveling at lower speed.

More road capacity is directly proportional to more vehicle kilometres traveled, a fact confirmed by Peter Newman from the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. Having a walking and cycling strategy while road capacity building continues apace is worse than “lipstick on the gorilla”.

The long term effects of bold initiatives, such as the removal of a major highway in Seoul, are many and sometimes unexpected. The mayor of Seoul was quoted⁴ as saying "The tearing down of the motorway has had both intended and unexpected effects. As soon as we destroyed the road, the cars just disappeared and drivers changed their habits. A lot of people just gave up their cars. Others found a different way of driving. In some cases, they kept using their cars but changed their routes. The city had beefed up its bus service and given people options to avoid the motorway, and the effect on the

³ Tolley, R. 2006. *Why walking is critically important to the health of people and cities*. Presentation to New Zealand Walking Conference, November 2006

⁴ The Guardian, 1st November 2006 “Heart and Soul of the City”

environment was remarkable. [Kee Yeon] Hwang [professor at Hongik University] says... "many birds came back, plus fish, insects and plants. The variety of wildlife has vastly increased since we tore up the road."

The creation of safe, attractive and accessible pedestrian facilities is vital for successful vibrant city centres for shoppers, residents, workers and visitors, and in turn brings considerable positive economic activity. The city of Birmingham, England, is an excellent example of the local council taking the lead and implementing planning strategies to rejuvenate the city centre, improving pedestrian access and constructing high quality pedestrian facilities⁵. This process has brought more people into the city centre and has had both positive economic and environmental outcomes.

Increased safety and increased modal share are mutually supportive and can form a positive feedback loop or "virtuous circle". Studies undertaken in a number of countries including New Zealand⁶ indicate a link between increased numbers of walkers and cyclists on the road and increased safety for these groups. For example, a study from California found that the modal share of journeys by foot in Berkeley was 14.9% and relative risk index was 0.8 (the smaller the better). In Sacramento the walking mode share was 2.8% and relative risk index was 2.1, and Lakewood, with 1.0% walking modal share, the relative risk index was 4.5. Therefore "policies that increase the numbers of people walking and bicycling appear to be an effective route to improving the safety of people walking and bicycling"⁷.

Land Use planning

All councils' district plans need to support land use that is compact, mixed-use and encourages accessible destinations. Such plans should consider excellent low-carbon transport systems and infrastructure as vital for sustainable land use and a high quality of life. It is of great importance that regional transport strategies do not simply involve the extrapolation of past transport and land use trends and instead look to anticipate future needs and challenges.

⁵ Tolley, R. 2003. *Providing for pedestrians: Principles and guidelines for improving pedestrian access to destinations and urban spaces*. Walk21. Department of Infrastructure, Victoria.

⁶ LTNZ 2006. *Research*, Issue 8. Land Transport New Zealand

⁷ p208. Jacobsen, P.L. 2003. Safety in numbers: more walkers and bicyclists, safer walking and bicycling. *Injury Prevention* 9: 205-209

Land use planning needs to discourage urban sprawl and the development of car-dependent communities which have no public transport, and no facilities within walking distance for people to walk to. Instead, developments should be clustered around transport hubs, with essential facilities within easy reach - smart growth.

Transit, regional councils and district councils need to work together to provide safe, accessible and pleasant pedestrian facilities as one part of encouraging the shift away from private vehicle dependence, as well as providing for the numerous people who already walk. This is most particularly important for people who do not have access to other forms of transport (most particularly to cars) such as elderly, young, visually impaired and disabled people.

Living Streets Aotearoa promotes a new Road User Hierarchy (for urban design, transport corridor and district plan use) similar to City of York Council in the United Kingdom. The hierarchy is:

- Pedestrians with special mobility or visual needs
- Pedestrian commuters and visitors
- Cyclists
- Public transport
- Commercial vehicles (service and delivery)
- Car share
- Car visitors/shoppers

In addition cities should consider some priority for essential business use e.g. carpenters, plumbers and local delivery rather than 1 person 1 car commuters with no mobility difficulties.

Such a hierarchy should guide future resource allocation and would signal to the public a change in priorities towards more sustainable modes.

Other innovative developments can also help reduce the need for people to make journeys – for example the provision of cheap and easily available videoconferencing facilities can reduce the need to travel to meetings. Provision of decent broadband facilities, throughout the country would encourage more working from home, and consequently less travel.

Healthy people and healthy communities

Adopting measures to tackle climate change by reducing carbon emissions has many flow-on effects for people and the communities in which they live and work. More people walking rather than using cars for transport will have beneficial effects not only on personal health and well being, but also on the health of communities.

Communities where there are people on the streets are safer than empty streets with cars rushing past. Walking encourages informal social interaction. People get to know each other, their neighbours, school friends who live nearby. People on the street provide much better surveillance than cameras.

There are countless other benefits which flow on from encouraging walking and building more walkable communities.

Action needed now

It is incumbent on government to meet the ubiquitous challenge of climate change by adopting and vigorously promoting strategies and initiatives which will encourage people to change their lifestyles towards becoming less emission-intensive. Addressing climate change now will cost considerably less than addressing greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation action in the future⁸. Though there is a time preference for receiving benefits today rather than benefits in the future, government needs to show courage and leadership and be prepared to address climate change issues immediately and with genuine dedication and appropriate investment

Living Streets Aotearoa encourages government to be bold in taking immediate action to increase the modal share of walking and cycling, while concurrently reducing the modal share of private motor vehicle. This will achieve a reduction in carbon emissions.

⁸ Stern, N. 2006. *Stern Review on the economics of climate change*. <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk>