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Wellington Regional Strategy: 'A Sustainable Economic Growth Framework for Our Region' – Consultation Document

Submission from Living Streets Wellington

30 September 2005

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the consultation document.

Living Streets Wellington

Living Streets Wellington is a branch of Living Streets Aotearoa, a network of groups dedicated to promoting walking and its benefits. Our vision is “More people walking 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.”¹

Introduction

Wellington Region's development strategy is important not only for the region's walkability, but for its implications in terms of broader quality of life and residents' well-being. The Regional Growth Framework therefore matters to Living Streets Wellington members.

Reflecting this interest, Living Streets offers this submission, alongside a separate submission that we have made to Greater Wellington on the RLTS strategic options, which have a more direct connection to the walkability and quality of life of our streets and public places.

Our present submission focuses on issues relating to urban form and transport set out within the WRS growth framework.

¹ <http://www.livingstreets.org.nz/admin.html>

Living Streets is broadly supportive of the WRS regional growth framework and considers it a high quality thoughtful document which provides a good analysis of the prospects for and strategic options facing the Wellington region. It contains many excellent statements such as that under Action Area 2.5, that "...if the [local] centres are well-designed and linked to stations and walkways and cycleways, they can help relieve pressure on the roading system." (p27)

However, we believe the strategy could be even more strategic and forward looking.

A major concern we have is that the strategy is too focused on growth at the expense of sustainability and the quality of our urban environments. Living Streets is **not** opposed to enhancing economic prosperity – indeed we support this -- but it is unclear to us why there is such a strong focus on economic growth in what is a "Wellington Regional Strategy" and should, prima facie, have a broader compass.

We would prefer to see an emphasis on **quality of life** and **well-being**, or even **sustainable prosperity**, rather than growth, since these concepts, especially the linked notion of sustainable development, are more consistent with balancing prosperity and other facets of quality of life, such as high quality urban places. Moreover, in a **longer term** perspective, which a strategic framework should consider, continuing growth is simply not sustainable, while **development is**.

We would note that de-emphasising growth is **not** a minority view: it is a clear set of preferences held by **most** New Zealanders – as indicated by the results of a survey commissioned by the Growth and Innovation Advisory Board in 2003 (see **Annex** below) – and this set of preferences is very unlikely to be different for people in the Wellington region.

We would underline that, **at the same**, we strongly support the WRS emphasis on **spatial / urban form** considerations, and the strong connection the document makes to "the quality of our local areas, and how easy it is to walk, cycle or use public transport locally." (p8) We commend the document for this recognition.

Section 3: vision and outcomes

The "Outcomes we want" on p17 of the document generally represent a well-stated set of outcomes.

We would endorse the importance (2: Connected) of excellent public transport services. However, we would like to see more explicit reference in this Outcome to walking and cycling, which are important modes of connection. We suggest finishing the statement with:

"...well functioning highways and local links, and excellent walking, cycling and public transport facilities and services."

The document seeks comment (p18) on Growth framework **principles** (Appendix 1). We offer the following comment on this important set of principles.

- “Overarching principles for ...sustainable prosperity...”: we support these.

“Sustainable **economic** development principles” (emphasis added)

- These should be retitled as “**Sustainable development principles**” since they include **other** matters than economic development (e.g. “avoids environmental harm”). Moreover, coming directly after the prosperity principles, it is unnecessary to have a second set of principles focused (as the title ‘sustainable economic development principles’ would imply) on economic goals.
- We support most of the SD principles set out, but would substitute the word development for growth where possible (e.g No 1 would be recast as: “The benefits of economic **development** are available to communities in a way that supports social cohesion.”)
- SD Principle 3: “The economy which drives economic growth is innovative, diverse and able to adapt easily to change” is poorly worded, and might better read “The region’s people and businesses are innovative...”
- SD Principle 5 states at present: “The nature, volume and scale of any economic growth does not lead to parallel levels of environmental harm. Economic growth is ‘decoupled’ from environmental harm.” This could be better put. It risks implying that some quantum of environmental harm is acceptable as long as it is less than the quantum of economic growth. This implication is problematic, and could be avoided by saying: “Economic growth is decoupled from environmental harm, so that enhanced prosperity is not accompanied by environmental damage.”

Sustainable Transport System principles:

- Principle 2 (equitable access) currently states: “People have access to social, economic, educational and recreational activities and freight moves around efficiently”. This reference to freight is entirely out of place, and is in any case already covered by the next principle (principle 3), which states “The transport system maximises the efficient movement of people, goods and services.” The statement of principle 2 should simply end after the word ‘activities.’
- Principle 3: Since one cannot move services, and ICT is vital, and it is access rather than movement as such that is important, this should be amended to state:
“Transport and communication systems maximise efficient access to people, goods and services.”
- Principle 6, “Is environmentally sustainable” currently states: “The transport system is managed in a way that optimises allocation and use of resources, including non-renewable energy sources.” This is an

inadequate statement of environmental sustainability. We suggest: "The transport system will be more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable, imposing minimal adverse impacts on the environment, and contributing to a reduction in regional greenhouse gas emissions." Please note that this formulation is consistent with that of the NZ Transport Strategy 2002.²

Section 4: Focus areas

There are many statements in this section which we support. An example is under Action area 1.4. We applaud the aim of "Making sure no one falls behind."

Similarly, we support (Action Area 3.6) "identifying and marketing underutilised land, or potentially even intervening and developing land." The underlying principles of good urban design here should be to increase compactness of development while preserving green space. The longer-term benefit of this is greater efficiency and sustainability through enhancing access, reducing energy use and emissions, and ensuring that urban areas remain livable.

Appendix 2 (measurement)

We were delighted to see the proposal to use a Genuine Progress Indicator approach as the basis of measuring performance. We applaud that. However, we do not believe that the "Wellington Regional Growth Strategy" as it is called should focus only on GDP and urban form assessment. Moreover, we would be happy to advise on urban form measurement sourced from Wellington rather than Oregon.

Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on the consultation document. Members would be very happy to meet with the RLTC to discuss this submission, and work with the Greater Wellington staff to design a more comprehensive and effective strategic option for our future transport development.

² Extract from the NZ Transport Strategy, 2002:

ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Transport will be more energy efficient and environmentally sustainable. Negative local and global environmental effects of transport will be reduced through education, regulation, technology and investment.

Enhanced mobility for people, goods and services within New Zealand and between New Zealand and overseas will be achieved through creative responses that meet people's needs with minimal adverse effects on the environment. Improving the efficiency of existing road and rail networks, promoting alternatives to roads, and reducing traffic growth will be key elements in minimising the adverse effects of land transport.

Transport policy will reflect New Zealand's commitment to energy efficiency, and to the Kyoto Protocol and the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and will recognise the role transport plays in meeting this commitment.

Living Streets Wellington

Contacts to discuss this document:

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Annex

New Zealanders' attitudes to quality of life, the environment and economic growth

PERSONAL IMPORTANCE – SUMMARY TABLE									
<i>Now can you tell me how important the following aspects of New Zealand are to you PERSONALLY - where - 0 is not important at all and 10 is very important? Remember you can say any number between 0 and 10 - 5 is the mid-point on this scale.</i>									
	All			Maori			Business		
	0-3 %	4-6 %	7-10 %	0-3 %	4-6 %	7-10 %	0-3 %	4-6 %	7-10 %
Quality of life	0	7	93	1	11	88	0	7	93
Quality of natural environment	1	12	87	1	18	80	0	12	87
Quality of education	3	13	83	5	14	81	4	14	82
The public health system	6	16	78	6	20	74	9	16	75
Employment prospects	5	18	76	5	19	75	6	19	74
Level of wages and salaries	4	23	72	5	26	69	3	23	74
Race relations	8	24	68	6	22	72	9	26	65
Potential to increase personal wealth	5	27	68	6	25	69	2	29	69
Level of economic growth	4	28	67	5	32	60	3	22	75
Business opportunities	5	29	65	6	32	62	2	22	76
Providing a supportive business environment	6	28	64	6	32	61	3	24	73
Quality of artistic and cultural heritage	10	35	54	4	22	72	9	39	51

Base: All respondents

Source: Report by UMR (2003) commissioned by the Growth and Innovation Advisory Board:

<http://www.giab.govt.nz/uploadedfiles/Documents/Reports/Final-SummtRpt1.pdf>