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Oral Submission on the Draft Regional Land Transport Programme 2009-2012

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As previously explained, Living Streets promotes the use of walking as a first choice in transport where possible for short trips, and also promotes walking for its recreational and fitness benefits. Our interests automatically include public transport and roading issues as these connect directly with the viability of walking as a means of transport.

To summarise the main points from our written submission, we expressed our concern on the following issues:

- Bus services: need for rapid development of a fully functional public transport system which can act as a genuine alternative to private car use, both within and between towns
- Distribution of proposed expenditure: We believe there is a gross imbalance between the amounts proposed for roading and that available for all other forms of land transport. This may not be taking into account the hidden costs of road transport in terms of safety, maintenance, public health, environmental damage and peak oil and climate change issues.
- The intense focus on state highway construction and maintenance within the roading budget is of particular concern.
- We would like to see much more attention given to rail systems, even though this will now certainly mean lobbying at government level as a result of the recent change in focus of the GPS on land transport.
- We fully support the apparent intention to improve facilities and safety for pedestrians and cyclists, but feel this is most unlikely to happen given the level of funding available, and the huge emphasis on road networks.

The summary of the RLTP provided to householders emphasised several items on which we would like to see further consultation:

The Economic Growth Triangle

The prediction is of ongoing growth in numbers of residents, amount of freight and need for roads. But growth, especially in transport, can't go on for ever. That is akin to cancer, and to be planning to cater for it by building ever-increasing road networks verges on the insane, considering the inevitable coming restrictions on fuel supply and the need to reduce carbon emissions. Carbon emissions are likely to become much more of an economic threat now that the US is taking them seriously and is likely to force penalties on countries that do not comply to new standards.

The real assets in the triangle are the people and their skills, and the degree to which we can retain them here. We desperately need intelligent innovation and the people with these kinds of skills are often attracted by safe, walkable or cycle-friendly environments with strong cultural and community assets. In the US and Canada, housing prices have tended to rise in communities with these attributes even as they are falling in many other areas. A very interesting 16 minute video, made in 2004, of cycle- and pedestrian-accessible communities in Copenhagen, Bogota and Amsterdam can be viewed at:

http://video.google.com/videosearch?source=ig&hl=en&rlz=1G1GGLQ_ENNZ269&=&q=Shimano%20Bogota%20cycling&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=vw#.

It can also be found on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rwwxrWHBB8>

A copy on CD has been also provided to the chairman at today's hearing.

Transport in the Waikato

We are mystified as to why the Waikato should wish to continue the trend for huge amounts of heavy commercial vehicle movements every day. Having higher than the national average of these is something to be worried about, not to accommodate. If, as quoted, 55% of all national freight originates in Auckland but only 18 to 23% of all rail freight travels through the area, it is obvious we have a road transport problem which could be very successfully addressed by getting more freight on the railways. This would reduce heavy vehicles on the roads immediately, improve the Waikato's appalling road safety record, reduce costly wear and tear on existing roads and possibly remove the need for construction of prohibitively expensive bypasses. When approximately 6km of bypass at Te Rapa is estimated to cost over \$120million, it might pay to think how else that money could be spent. Again, it will involve local authorities lobbying central government for changes in policy.

The Waikato Expressway

While the stated aim of reducing road accidents and saving time is possibly admirable, the whole exercise may be very much a double-edged sword. Hopefully the Waikato is not intended to consist of Hamilton and Tauranga linked by giant highways to Auckland. There are large numbers of small towns along the way, many of which stand to be bypassed by the intended road works. Again, while they will doubtless be delighted to have huge trucks off their main streets, they probably also fear the prospect of becoming ghost towns, as has threatened Ohinewai and Pokeno. These are the only two that have been fully bypassed, as Mercer is immediately beside the main highway and is visible from it. Ngaruawahia, Cambridge, Rangiriri, and maybe even Hamilton itself stand to be places that tourists don't even see because the road goes somewhere else. A heavy traffic bypass might be much more useful than a complete bypass, and a full rail service might be better yet.

Improving Urban access and mobility

Integrated land use and transport planning are great ideas. At the moment that's all they appear to be. The reality is that despite Access Hamilton, our city is a pedestrian and cycle nightmare, with areas such as the Whitiara Bridge, Fairfield Bridge, Cobham Drive and Te Rapa Road remaining frightening and very dangerous. Some have been made much worse in recent years by attempts to speed up traffic movement at all costs. To improve things we need better public transport, less private car use, and a recognition that safety facilities must be provided for cyclists and walkers if they are ever to be able to view these methods of transport as realistic. The ring road is merely an encouragement to traffic to travel at high speed, and the existence of the cross-city arterial, which is responsible for the appalling situation on Whitiara Bridge and Boundary Road, is completely counterproductive in terms of walking and cycling for commuters.

Actions requested

We recognise that there are many financial constraints on local authorities as they attempt to provide good services in their regions. We feel that a top priority is for EW, along with other regional authorities, to lobby central government for a change in the funding provided for public transport. At present this is only a 50% subsidy which means that the very large set-up costs for public transport systems fall heavily on ratepayers. Roads are often 100% subsidised, so the choice is obvious in current economic terms. It might also be wrong. A built-in bias towards the more affordable choice has nothing to do with good sense or the future wellbeing of our communities.