

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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Presentation topic	Talking the Walk in Urban Areas		
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Presentation Remit (500 word maximum)

Dave Lamb is a Senior Lecturer in Sport and Leisure Management and holds an Honours degree in Environmental Studies and a Masters degree in Leisure Management. He lectures on a range of undergraduate and post-graduate papers in sport and recreation management areas and is involved with supervising student research at postgraduate level. Dave is a relative newcomer to NZ (3 years) and previously taught in the similar areas at a number of Universities in the UK. Prior to lecturing, Dave spent a number of years working in community recreation and development, landscape gardening, leisure management and undertook some consultancy work on sport/leisure projects. He is a keen and avid walker in urban areas and is a keen supporter of making our cities more walkable and sustainable.

This paper is informed by a literature review of urban design and transportation research applicable to walking. The outcome of this review indicates that research in this area is primarily USA based, with the car user as central. Yet, over reliance on the car has caused widespread environmental degradation, traffic congestion and over reliance on foreign oil (Drueding, 2004). Furthermore car centric cities are more costly to provide in terms of expenditure on infrastructure, especially transportation (Sheenon, 2002). Research in the area, has effectively relegated the needs of the urban walker to the periphery (Kempton, 2004). This has led to a limited understanding of how people, actually move through and interact with the urban environment. Furthermore, this has resulted in urban landscape policy dominated by the concerns of physical planners and transportation, rather than on pedestrians (Redmon, 2003).

The second stage of the research utilised qualitative methods, with a focus group study involving 10 people in each of the four cities listed here (Christchurch, New Zealand; Manchester, UK; Brisbane, Australia and Singapore). The focus group research elicited a number of issues relating to the walkability of these research sites. These issues will provide a useful framework for further exploration, using semi structured interviews with 20 research participants in Christchurch, NZ. This part of the research will be conducted over the summer period of 2006 with a research assistant enrolled as a post graduate student at Lincoln University.

This paper presents the key findings that arose from the research in the four research areas, outlined above and highlights the elements of good and bad practice in designing urban areas for walkers, reported by the focus group research participants.

Re-emphasising and revisiting walking as a viable alternative to motorised forms of transport and an integrated part of the urban transport system can lead to a more human scale view of our city landscapes. It has been widely reported that in most major cities throughout the world, traffic congestion is getting worse and continuing to cause a multitude of problems, not least increasing pollution levels. Other evidence suggests that we are still too car dependant (Kempton, 2004 and Brindle, 2003) and that, pedestrians are highly vulnerable to automobile accidents in urban areas (Redmon, 2003).

Walking is the glue that could bind the transport system together. However this will require a more radical approach to the planning and managing of our cities in more sustainable and innovative ways, rather than on the elitist assumption that those with the knowledge know what is best for us (Brindle, 2001).

In concluding, I will suggest future initiatives need to be focussed around strategy, design and promotion and highlight a number of walking schemes and programmes in our cities with the needs of the urban as central. Prioritising the needs of walkers in our cities will result in many positive individual and environmental benefits. Finally, I will mention a number of directions in which future research in this area needs to be heading with the objective of encouraging more walkable and liveable cities.