



Living Streets Hamilton: Submission to HCC LTP, 2015-2025

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Living Streets would like to address issues surrounding transport, active transport and the development of the CBD. Some of these are interconnected.

1. Roding and cycle/pedestrian facilities

We note that major road construction includes \$88 million over five projects (Rototuna, Peacockes, Rotokauri, a new bridge and the East-West cross city connector). While we are fully aware of the dire state of government subsidies for any form of active transport or public transport, and realise the enthusiasm of HCC to take what subsidies it can get for roading construction, we feel that priorities are, as ever, unbalanced, especially in the light of what increasing numbers of cities in other developed countries are doing, and have been doing for years, in order to make themselves liveable and to encourage people into the city centre. Of this \$88 million, presumably between \$2 and \$4 million (at a maximum) are earmarked for vital pedestrian and safety facilities on the notoriously unfriendly cross-city connector. Rather ominously, the work that is scheduled is targeted for years 5 to 7 of the LTP. From past experience, projects that far off rarely happen. Reasons are found in subsequent revisions of the plan to drop them. This sounds deeply cynical, but experience has taught most active transport activists in New Zealand to be cynics.

As an article in the Waikato Times (April 22, 2015) indicates, even HCC's own infrastructure general manager, Chris Allen, has stated quite clearly that "it's not sustainable to keep on building new roads. If you talk about managing our demand for transport, it's about investment in public transport systems and walking and cycling facilities." So, why are we delaying their construction for 5 or 7 years, or maybe indefinitely?

Hamilton, as we have stated before, is ideally suited to combinations of active and public transport: it's mostly flat, quite compact, and there are a good number of people living within walking and cycling distance of the CBD and a large number of inner-city schools. The only thing stopping many of them from walking or cycling on a daily basis is a very rational fear for their safety on the major roads that divide Hamilton into separate sections.

Any active transport journey is only as viable as its most dangerous segment. We have lovely shared paths in many of our new subdivisions – generally on one side of the road. Crossings are often another matter, because they cost significant amounts of money. However, without them, the rest of the path is essentially useless for regular commuting. Very few people, other than the fit and determined, will willingly ride a bike or walk if they face a dangerous intersection or road crossing on a daily basis.

The East-West cross-city connector is one of the worst barriers to active transport (although there are many others almost as bad, as mentioned a little later), with very high vehicle numbers at precisely the peak hours in which active transport commuters need to use it, and almost no safe crossing places. While we appreciate the work that has been done recently at Five Cross Roads, and are extremely pleased with how traffic has responded to the raised bed zebra crossings and the light-controlled crossing on Fifth Ave, the huge problem remains Boundary Rd.

The two distant-future proposed solutions (lights at the mosque intersection and at Five Cross Rds) would make an enormous difference to safety for walkers and cyclists of all ages. Considering the change in transport activity that this could achieve, we ask that these projects, representing somewhere between 2.5 and 5% of the total \$88 million, be brought forward for immediate action, in the first year of the annual plan. More than 5% of the population already walk and cycle on a regular basis, so why are they not entitled to at least 5% of the transport funding, when they need it (i.e. now), rather than at some vague point in the future? We recommend either additional borrowing, or cutting/postponing less urgent projects, in order to fund essential safety measures for walkers and cyclists.

Bear in mind that this is only a one-off request for immediate action to solve one of Hamilton's worst access problems. **We are in complete agreement with Cycle Action Waikato (CAW), who note that the total LTP roading expenditure is \$216 million, and who have asked HCC to provide an ongoing annual budget for cycling and walking facilities.** At the moment, Hamilton is out of line with most other New Zealand cities, let alone other countries, in providing almost nothing. As an example, the partial fix at Five Cross Rds in 2014 consumed almost the entire pedestrian infrastructure budget for the year, leaving nothing to deal with other major issues.

CAW have suggested that a regular 5.5% of the annual transport budget be assigned to cycling infrastructure. We completely support this request with the proviso that it include pedestrian infrastructure as well – the two are often closely linked and safe pedestrian facilities are often a direct benefit to cyclists as well.

There are numerous areas in Hamilton that would benefit hugely from pedestrian treatments. Some that are immediately obvious include the intersection of Comries and Bankwood Rds, where either lights or a roundabout with raised bed crossings similar to those at Five Cross Rds would make life much safer for local residents and the children of Bankwood School; the intersection of Clarkin and River Rd, where a roundabout with raised bed crossings would not only improve life for pedestrians trying to use the riverside walkway, but avoid motorists taking their lives in the hands whenever they try a right turn onto River Rd; the huge length of River Rd where nothing but refuges are offered for the safety of preschoolers attending kindy and elderly people trying to get to the dairy (or to town); the nightmare that is Te Rapa Rd, with 4 lanes and a 60kph speed limit; the roundabout at Dinsdale; the appalling situation at Thomas Rd roundabout in Rototuna, which has already claimed lives... Most of these are known and recognised as problem areas by your staff, but they are obliged to shrug and apologise and tell us there is no money for such projects. This needs to be re-examined.

While Hamilton City Council does not bear direct responsibility for pedestrian deaths on its roads, there is a moral consideration involved when people die because of the lack of safe infrastructure. Recently we had four pedestrian deaths within the city boundaries within a year. While not all such deaths are preventable, some certainly are. The current value of a statistical life is around \$4 million. If HCC

committed the cost of even one life on an annual basis to providing safe walking and cycling access, we would make significant progress.

2. The CBD

As stated, we believe that pedestrian and cycle access are strategic components of getting the CBD back on its feet (so to speak!) Easy access to a central shopping precinct by cycle or on foot would add a great deal of attraction to the CBD as a place to be, especially at weekends. If people have to get in a car, yes, they'll go to the Base, or Chartwell, or Rototuna. If they can safely and enjoyably get on a bike or go for a walk to get to a shopping centre, they might prefer to come to the CBD. But there are issues that need to be addressed.

Last weekend I conducted an informal survey (by walking round the CBD from Ulster St to Knox St, including Ward, Collingwood and Bryce Sts) and found 75 empty or demolished street-level shops. Some of these are very large, such as the old Kathmandu premises and the vacant Farmer's building (which I counted as only one shop each). One of the demolition sites (the old Les Mills fitness site) has been trying to attract investors since last year and still remains a parking lot behind hoardings. There is also a large amount of second-storey office space sitting vacant, which I didn't include. Some owners are sufficiently desperate that they are offering "Significant Rent-Free Options" (see the two never-occupied stores on the corner of London St under the Quest Apartments). Whatever may be being proposed about the revitalisation of our CBD, it doesn't seem to be happening in a very obvious manner. Shops are closing regularly, and often heading for lower-rent or more populated areas. As has been suggested before – we need to think differently, and merely building more commercial buildings (like the one on the corner of Collingwood and Anglesea St opposite the old Farmers building, which has remained untenanted and internally unfinished for many months) does not seem to be the answer.

The obvious things are being ignored. How about:

Instead of destroying the Municipal Swimming Pool (and presumably selling off the site to another developer so another unnecessary building can be constructed), AND talking about constructing new swimming pools in the suburbs at a cost of several million, how about we aim to revitalise a most unusual attraction – a tepid pool right in the middle of the CBD, which can provide a healthy lunchtime venue for local workers (who can walk to it) and can again be used by local schools such as Sacred Heart, Marian School and Hamilton East Primary (who can also walk to it). This would be much better use of public funds than the construction of assorted woodwork around the perfectly functional and natural Wellington St Beach – at least Mighty River Power don't raise and lower the water levels in public swimming pools! If we want Hamilton to have some stand-out features, this could be one of them.

Try to deal with the absentee landlords who are apparently causing so much of the problem in the CBD – while some councillors will object strenuously, it might be better for the council to own some of these properties, rent them out cheaply for a while, and use them to attract small, interesting businesses into the CBD. Once things improve, the buildings can be sold on to people who actually live and work here. If Cambridge can manage a main street that is almost fully populated with shops, many of which are very attractive (antique shops, manufacturing jewellers, delicatessens, independent bookshops, gift shops operated by local artists, and many other interesting tourist traps), why are we reduced to cafes and banks, bracketed by empty buildings?

Make the main street for pedestrians and cyclists only. People don't shop from their cars, they shop on foot. Yes, we need parking (preferably free), but in parking buildings at the ends of the main street or at the Arena, with free shuttles to get people in and out of the main CBD. Walking the length of the main street isn't much different to walking from Mitre 10 at the Base down to DressSmart at the other end! And the Base provides mini shuttles to accommodate the elderly, the mobility-impaired and the just plain tired. It's not impossible. A CBD populated by brightly-coloured electric tuk-tuks or their equivalent as the only vehicles would again be a tourist attraction, and a reason for locals to go to town as well. As we have said many times, the full occupation of Casa Bella Lane is a great indication that pedestrian areas attract both shopkeepers and customers. Can we not learn from experience, especially when comparing Casa Bella Lane to the rapidly dying Alexandra St? Previous councils have brought many inspired people here to give public lectures and hold workshops on how to revitalise the city: Roger Geller from Portland, Oregon and David Engwicht from Australia are two that spring most readily to mind. Their ideas have been almost totally ignored. There is a lot of expertise out there about how to make cities work. We aren't using it. Now might be the time to start.

And just as a final thought, please engage Jeremy Shirley to paint the Wintec wall, or to construct some banners to hang on it if there are structural reasons why it can't be painted. He's given enough demonstrations of his creative skills all over Hamilton, and has even recently done a mini version on the wall under the Victoria Bridge on Grantham St. A spectacular, professional piece of art below Wintec could make a huge difference to how people see the CBD. For the cost of some materials and the artist's fee, couldn't we give it a try? At the moment that wall is a reflection of how people in Hamilton see the CBD: grey, patchy and boring.