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Dear Ms Chetwynd

Submission from Greater Wellington Regional Council on the proposed Cobham Drive to Buckle Street transport improvements

1. Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed improvements to Wellington's inner-city transport network between Cobham Drive and Buckle Street.

Greater Wellington's submission focuses on consistency of the proposals with the planning framework provided by the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan, public transport considerations, and fit with the policy framework provided by the regional walking, cycling and road safety plans.

2. Strategic policy framework

The Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy 2010 – 2040 identifies key outcomes for the region's transport network. Under this policy framework, the region develops a number of multi-modal corridor plans (including the Ngauranga to Wellington Airport Corridor Plan) and mode or issue specific implementation plans (including regional walking, cycling, and road safety plans).

3. Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan

The Ngauranga to Wellington Airport Corridor Plan provides the agreed framework for a multi-modal approach to transport improvements through central Wellington.

The corridor plan aims to strengthen four key transport elements in the city:

1. a high quality and frequency passenger transport 'spine'
2. highly accessible and attractive 'activity' or shopping streets
3. a reliable and accessible 'ring' or bypass route for vehicles

4. inter-connected and convenient local street, walking, cycling and passenger transport networks.

The current Wellington Public Transport Spine Study, being lead by Greater Wellington, will investigate the feasibility and options to deliver the frequent and high quality public transport ‘spine’ element of the plan. Other public transport improvements are already in place or underway to improve public transport quality along the spine in the short-term – eg. the Manners Mall alignment project, bus priority measures and Real Time Information.

Improvements to the Basin Reserve, to separate north-south from east-west traffic flows and to enable a dedicated public transport corridor to be implemented without significantly worsening traffic congestion, is a key action to support the corridor plan approach.

Investigating and constructing improvements to State Highway 1 (by duplicating the Terrace and Mt Victoria tunnels and four-laning Ruahine Street and Wellington Road) is also identified in the plan to contribute to the reliable and accessible ‘ring road’ approach. Timing of these aspects of the corridor plan is signalled to occur later than the Basin Reserve improvements. This is so that we can implement improvements to the public transport spine as a priority and take account of the impact of these improvements on the wider network.

NZTA’s Cobham Drive to Buckle Street transport improvements proposal is consistent with the strategic framework of the corridor plan. Greater Wellington would emphasise the importance of the timing of projects within the corridor plan, with the Basin improvements implemented first, and the wider improvements implemented later alongside the public transport spine improvements.

4. Regional Walking, Cycling and Road Safety Plans

Through the Regional Land Transport Strategy and its implementation plans, the region seeks to provide safe and accessible provision for pedestrians and cyclists, increase the use of walking and cycling, and improve road safety.

NZTA’s proposal has aspects that will be beneficial to active modes in terms of the role of streets and particular routes within the Wellington City transport network. Some enhanced walking and cycling provisions through new facilities are also part of the proposed improvements. There are also road safety benefits associated with the proposal by upgrading intersections and crossings along the SH1 route.

The detailed design of the proposals will be crucial to ensure that these potential benefits are realised. Greater Wellington seeks continued involvement in development of walking and cycling provision through the detailed design phase of this project. We note that some very useful feedback was received through the submission process from pedestrians, cyclists and advocacy groups and we encourage further consideration of this feedback as detailed design phases are progressed.

5. Public Transport Considerations

Improving public transport travel times and reliability along the north-south route through the Basin Reserve, a key public transport corridor, and allowing for a dedicated public transport spine in future, are both crucial to support growth of public transport mode share in Wellington City. The proposed improvements, including grade separation at the Basin Reserve, support this outcome together with other objectives for the transport network identified through the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan.

Wider public transport network impacts and improvements will need to be considered and integrated with NZTA's proposals to ensure that the benefits for public transport envisaged as part of the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan are realised. This will require close and ongoing engagement between NZTA, Wellington City Council, Greater Wellington and public transport operators.

The following sections provide comments and suggestions relating to specific parts of the overall proposals, within the context of the framework set out above.

6. Basin Reserve Improvements

As mentioned above, Greater Wellington supports grade separation at the Basin Reserve as this is expected to improve bus journey times by up to 35% along the Kent/Cambridge and Adelaide Road corridor in peak times. As stated in the consultation brochure, the project is crucial to allow a high quality public transport system (such as bus rapid transit or light rail) to operate efficiently in the longer term. It will also have benefits for other road users in relation to travel times, reliability and safety.

Of the two options presented for grade separation at the Basin Reserve intersection, Greater Wellington considers Option A to be the most appropriate. Not only does this option cost less than Option B, but, more importantly from an urban form aspect, it aligns with the existing street grid pattern, it involves less severance through Memorial Park, and it has a lesser footprint and impact on properties.

In relation to the alternative Option X proposed by the Architectural Centre during the consultation period, we note the following advice received from NZTA.

- Option X is a concept only that has not been developed to the same level of detail as other the options and there is significant uncertainty around the actual cost of this scheme.
- The transport benefits of this option are 10-15% less than for other options and it would cost around \$145M-\$200M which would be significantly more expensive than the options under consultation.

We also note that NZTA has identified concerns about Option X relating to the impact on property in Sussex Street in order to achieve safe road and footpath widths, traffic impacts on Tory and Tasman Streets, a steep gradient for pedestrians/cyclists and public transport on the west side of the Basin Reserve, and significant costs associated with tunnelling under Memorial Park for which funding is not currently available.

Greater Wellington notes that a similar option (known as Option F) involving an east-west tunnel was assessed during NZTA's options development stage but was later ruled out, primarily due to its high cost and consequent low benefit/cost ratio. It is likely this would have been supported by Greater Wellington had it proved to be affordable.

However, even if funding for these more expensive alternative options were made available through the national land transport fund, the region would need to consider the subsequent impact on funding availability for other regional transport projects, in the context of the priorities set out in the Wellington Regional Land Transport Strategy.

In relation to tunnelling under Memorial Park, Greater Wellington supports future proofing the design of the preferred option to allow for the possibility of a tunnel to be built under Memorial Park in future, should funds become available.

Public transport

We ask that Greater Wellington be closely involved in the detailed design of proposed improvements at the Basin Reserve. A number of public transport projects being led by Greater Wellington will need to be integrated with the proposals. The Wellington City Bus Review will determine short to medium term improvements to the public transport network through the city, and the Wellington PT Spine Study will identify the best options for the longer term along this core corridor. Relevant issues for further discussion include: the location of bus stops; the suitability of the road layout to facilitate a possible future high quality public transport system; and the timing of the improvements.

6.1 Walking and cycling

Ensuring maintained and enhanced access for pedestrians and cyclists through the Basin Reserve precinct as part of the proposed improvements will be very important.

Greater Wellington strongly supports inclusion of a clip-on pedestrian/cyclist facility on the bridge structure to the north of the Basin Reserve. This would provide an additional walking/cycling connection and contribute to enhancing access for pedestrians and cyclists. We think it would be a missed opportunity not to provide this additional connection for pedestrians and cyclists as part of this key transport interchange upgrade.

We note that proposed improvements around the Basin Reserve should specifically address the issue of safe and effective walking and cycling facilities between Adelaide Road and Kent/Cambridge Terrace at all times of the day, including when the route through the Basin Reserve itself is closed.

7. Mt Victoria Tunnel Duplication

Greater Wellington supports the duplication of the Mt Victoria Tunnel in the longer term to ensure safe and effective traffic movement along this route.

We strongly support the proposed pedestrian and cyclist facilities as part of the duplicated tunnel. Of the two proposed options, we prefer the first option which involves full separation of the pedestrian and cyclist facility from the traffic lanes. This option includes transparent sections (windows) to provide pedestrians and cyclists with adequate personal security, while protecting against vehicle noise and fumes. A NZTA survey of pedestrians and cyclists found vehicle noise and fumes to be the primary dis-incentives for using the existing tunnel facility.

8. Ruahine Street/Wellington Road Upgrades

Overall, Greater Wellington supports the upgrade of Ruahine Street/Wellington Road in the longer term to ensure safe and effective traffic movement along this route.

8.1 Public transport

The proposed improvements along the SH1 route are expected to take traffic away from adjacent routes used by public transport such as Constable Street and Wallace Street, with associated benefits for bus journey times along these routes.

It will be important that the traffic impacts on Moxham Avenue, as a result of the proposed intersection changes, are considered in relation to their impact on this key public transport corridor serving Hataitai and the eastern suburbs. Enhancements such as bus priority lanes along Moxham Avenue and other key streets may be required alongside the Ruahine Street/Wellington Road improvements.

8.2 Road safety

The road safety aspects of the proposed improvements are strongly supported.

In particular, we support the closure of right turning out of Taurimu Street and intersection upgrades at Goa Street and Wellington Road. Even with traffic volumes at current levels, these intersections are becoming unsafe for road users.

The proposed intersection upgrades along this route will also improve pedestrian safety and connectivity across Ruahine Street, between destinations such as Hataitai Park and Hataitai Village, which is currently difficult for pedestrians to cross.

8.3 Walking and cycling

With the implementation of the proposal, traffic is expected to be reduced along the waterfront route (Evans Bay to Oriental Bay) which would benefit other users of this popular commuter and recreational cycling route.

Greater Wellington supports the proposed off-road facility for walking/cycling along Ruahine Street/Wellington Road that links with the existing Cobham Drive shared path facility. This would provide a safe off-road option for cyclists and pedestrians travelling between the eastern suburbs and the central city. It is likely that most pedestrians who travel north-south through Hataitai will continue using Moxham Avenue as the focus of residential and community activity, therefore we think that a shared walk/cycle facility (of a good width for passing) would be acceptable.

However, we encourage further consideration of the detailed design aspects of this facility to ensure that it will be safe and used to full potential. This could include looking at best practice guidance for these types of facilities and considering, for example, how the facility could be designed to discourage illegal/unintended parking.

There is also a need to ensure pedestrians and cyclists can cross Taurima Street safely and conveniently where the pedestrian/cyclist facility exits the tunnel and joins the shared pathway along Ruahine Street. Providing safe and convenient crossing of the other intersections along the new pathway is also crucial.

Conclusions

Greater Wellington supports the proposed improvements from Cobham Drive to Buckle Street which are consistent with the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Plan.

We ask that NZTA progress the Basin Reserve grade separation component of the wider proposal as soon as possible.

Option A is preferred out of the two proposed options for grade separation at the Basin Reserve.

Greater Wellington supports future proofing the design of the preferred option to allow for the possibility of a tunnel to be built under Memorial Park in future should funds become available.

Greater Wellington supports inclusion of a 'clip-on' pedestrian/cyclist facility on the proposed bridge structure north of the Basin Reserve

In relation to the proposed new duplicated Mt Victoria tunnel, we support the option with full separation (by a wall with windows) between pedestrians/cyclists and general traffic.

Greater Wellington seeks ongoing involvement in the future development of these proposals, particularly in terms of how they integrate with existing and future public transport networks.

Yours sincerely

Fran Wilde
Chair