

Memo

To Shannon Watson, Environmental Planner, GHD

Copy Michelle Grinlinton-Hancock

From Catherine Hamilton

Office Auckland

Date 19 February 2020

File 3-53523.00 Eastern Bays Shared Path

Subject Evidence summary memo: Rev1

Background

This memo sets out the key points that will be raised in my evidence to be presented on behalf of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC).

I provided a peer review dated 15 May 2019 of the Eastern Bays Shared Path Recreation Assessment by Rob Greenaway and Associates for Hutt City Council. I subsequently provided comments to GWRC regarding requests for further information under Section 92 (1). I have received The Application, a copy of the full submissions and summary of submissions. 14 highlighted submissions with themes relevant to recreation have been read in full.

Overview of my Peer Review

The emphasis of my peer review was on the environment that would be created for recreation use and enjoyment. I looked at whether, in my professional opinion, acceptable levels of service would be achieved on the shared path as well as the coastal edge spaces it passes through. The main concerns I raised were:

Path width

I agreed with the Greenaway Recreation Assessment, that a 3.5m wide path is the preferred minimum width. I was not satisfied that the report adequately addressed the effects of not meeting this minimum standard. I concluded that a 2.5m wide path width is too narrow to meet best practice standards for a shared path which is constrained on one side by a live traffic lane and on the other side by drop down into the shore environment

Refuge areas

I noted the lack of pause points/respice areas which would alleviate the pressure on the narrowed parts of the shared path and provide opportunities for resting and enjoying the coastal landscape. I recommended these be located and sized optimally to provide frequent rest points rather than opportunistically spaces that already exist.

Overcrowding

I raised concern around intrusion by the shared path and its users into areas of quiet enjoyment of the coastal landscape such as the narrow strips of rocky edge.

Beach Renourishment

I raised concerns over beach renourishment being proposed as mitigation for loss of beach space, and the possibility that coastal processes may erode the nourished areas, thus nullifying the mitigation effect.

Comments on Response to Further Information, 29 May 2019 and the application as lodged

There is an unusual lack of certainty provided in the preliminary design plans that form part of the application. This lack of detail makes it difficult to draw conclusions on the level of recreation effects of the proposal.

Path Width

In the response to further information request under S92 (1), the applicant does not agree that a path width of 2.5m is too narrow in terms of user safety and comfort. The path widths remain unchanged in the application. The response emphasises the safety aspect of 2.5m which I agree is of paramount importance. From a recreation perspective, however, 2.5m provides a low level of service (LOS) in terms of comfort and enjoyment. There is little space for clearance between two people meeting and passing. The effects of a narrow path are exacerbated by the lack of a buffer strip against the live lane - which is 70km in places, and the drop off into the shore environment.

Furthermore, there is a handrail proposed for the route where the path reduces to 2.5m and the fall is greater than 1.0m. This handrail, when combined with the barriers on the road side, will effectively reduce the useable width to approx.2m.

According to Table 1 of Vic Roads Cycle Notes 21 (August 2013) - a generally accepted guideline for New Zealand shared paths, 2m is deemed too narrow for a recreational and regional commuter shared path. This width is adequate for pedestrians, but only caters for one cyclist or pedestrian in a wheelchair at a time. If a meeting or a passing occurs between a cyclist and another user, one of the users may need to move off the path.

Rolleston Ave in Christchurch is cited by the applicant as an example; this route is mostly 3m wide and has a buffer from the live lane. Christchurch City Council Cycleway Design guide, S3.3.3, recommends 3.5m as the preferred width for an urban shared path.

Refuge Points

A condition that relief areas will be deliberately designed along the project and that these will be modelled to inform both frequency and size (Chapter 5.1-5.7) is, in my opinion, a good outcome. This condition will enable greater interaction with the natural coastal environment and will help mitigate overcrowding on the linear route.

While I consider it a good outcome to provide for deliberate design of refuges, there is no detail provided to enable review and comment on the quality of the spatial design.

A design-led process with a focus on high LOS for recreation should be included in the LUDP at a minimum. Good design, however, is not formulaic. Optimum outcomes will need to be site-specific and consider less tangible/qualitative factors that make a space feel good. Review and auditing of the design development by a qualified landscape architect and recreation planner will be important in this regard.

I note that the Section 92 response identifies 17 'respite areas' including ramps and stairs. These are not respite areas, rather they are narrow thoroughfares that are intended for movement, not stopping.

Crowding and busyness

The potential effects of overcrowding on the shared pathway and such impacts on the beach environments remains unanswered.

The S92 response states that while overcrowding is not anticipated on the shared path there is the opportunity to adapt the design over time if there is an overwhelming increase in use, and signage could be installed (retrofitted) if necessary. It is unclear what 'adapting the design' would involve and how quality outcomes would be ensured if this should occur. Retrofitting with signage is an indication of sub-optimum design which should be avoided at the outset.

The S92 response notes that the beach at Sorento Bay is not considered to be remote or peaceful. I agree that it is not remote in the sense of, say, back-country landscapes. Nonetheless, there is an expectation from kiwis and visitors that our coastline is available for respite from crowding and busyness and we should attempt to manage these environments to minimise adverse effects of crowding and busyness.

Loss of Beach and Beach Nourishment

Dr Iain Dawe GWRCs coastal processes expert has confirmed he is relatively confident that, if undertaken carefully, beach nourishment will be successful because he is confident that the eastern bays have reached equilibrium. (email from Shannon Watson 12/02/20)

I am satisfied that successful beach nourishment to maintain the same beach area as at present day is an adequate mitigation measure for the loss of beach space. I would add that the retention of the natural features of the coast edge such as rocky outcrops would further enhance the recreation experience of the coastal edge.

I recommend that each location where beach loss would occur needs to be considered based on the specific characteristics of that location. A one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to result in the best outcomes.

Comments on submissions received

Of the 200 submissions received, fourteen focused on matters relating to recreation amenity. Several submitters supported a narrower path due to the desire to protect the coastal landscape and habitat values. While I agree that the matters raised by the submitters relating to environmental and landscape values are very important, I consider the adequate sizing of the path to be a matter for expert analysis.

Key points of my evidence

1. There is a lack of design certainty on which to assess the proposal. Rather, there is a reliance on the LAUD and BSUDP's to specifically address the detailed design and capture design controls of the project. These plans cannot be fully relied upon to guarantee good outcomes for recreation amenity. It is imperative that any refinements to the proposal be robustly audited and reviewed by independent experts.
2. LUDP and the BSUDP's should be extended to cover recreation amenity. While recreation has a strong cross over with other topics such as safety and landscape, there is a need to consider recreation value in its own right - including use, enjoyment health and wellbeing.
3. The application does not adequately address my concerns about the width of the pathway which I believe to be too narrow At 2.5m wide. I do not agree with the applicant's expert that an appropriate level of service will be achieved for recreation amenity. The suggesting that if the path turns out to be too narrow, then signage and adapted design could be considered down the track is a reactionary approach rather than a proactive design-led approach, which is far from optimum.
4. The inclusion of a barrier fence will further reduce the width of the 2.5 path to an effective useable space of approximately 2m wide. This reduction is due to cyclists clearing the barrier with their handlebars, together with the live-lane barrier and the need to avoid hitting this. I consider there will not be enough space for 'a meeting and a passing' for long lengths of the route in four locations. This is below accepted (LOS) standards.
5. The provision of deliberately designed refuge points is a good outcome. Adequate design will need to address size, frequency and spatial quality for the range of users including commuters and recreation users, fast and low/mobility impaired cyclists and pedestrians, groups, mobility scooters etc. I do not agree that steps, ramps and bus stops adequately perform the function of a respite area.
6. Adverse effects from crowding and busyness at beaches due to increased activity have not been adequately addressed. There is potential to mitigate these effects through spatial design.

7. Any design refinements developed through the LUDP are presented to the GWRC for careful consideration before further consents are granted and/or works begin on site.

Conclusion

The highly constrained shared path environment at the shore edge means that there is limited ability to provide more space without cantilevering over the coastal edge. There is a need to protect the many values of the coastal landscape and marine environment including biodiversity/habitat. There is also a need to keep users safe from traffic in the live lane. Due to this negotiation between the competing values and demands at this shore edge environment, a compromise has been made to reduce the design to below acceptable levels of service. From a recreation amenity point of view, these compromises will result in a sub-optimum outcome, compromising use, comfort and enjoyment.

Recommendations

I agree that an expert workshop would be worthwhile to discuss the proposal as it stands, trade-offs and mitigation measures and alternatives. At this workshop I suggest we cover:

- Known examples of 2.5m wide shared paths and 3.5m wide shared paths
- An overview of Local Government and Agency shared path guidelines and framework plans within New Zealand to understand best practice LOS
- Reference projects demonstrating well designed respite areas
- Scope extension to include a LUDP/ BSUDP's chapter on recreation amenity, in line with recommended criteria set out in your email dated 12/02/20.
- Auditing and review of design as it progresses past the preliminary design phase, using the LUDP/ BSUDP's chapter on recreation amenity

Reference images



Reference image of a refuge point with a high level of service (well-sized, well oriented, good position, accessible, quality design)