

Greater Wellington submission on Wellington City Council's Central City Safer Speed Limit proposal

5 March 2014

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Central City Safer Speed Limit Change proposal. Greater Wellington Regional Council supports the proposal to reduce the speed limit from 50km/h to 30km/h along the central city roads identified in the proposal as part of a wider package of measures to improve pedestrian safety in this important business, retail and pedestrian precinct.

Greater Wellington Regional Council is also strongly committed to improving safety outcomes for all users of the transport system, including pedestrians and cyclists. We recognise the need to balance the safety of pedestrians and cyclists through this area with efficient vehicle access to and through the central city.

Policy context

The Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) sets out the strategic policy framework for development of the regional transport network. The RLTS promotes a multi-modal approach to achieving its broad objectives. Amongst other outcomes, the strategy seeks to increase active transport trips and to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists. It also contains a vision that 'pedestrian and cycling networks will be convenient, safe and pleasant'. A 30 km/h speed limit will contribute to these objectives, in particular improved safety.

The Regional Road Safety Plan identifies and supports the Safer Systems approach to road safety. The Safe Systems approach recognises that road users make mistakes and seeks to eliminate death and serious injury as a likely consequence of human error. 'Safer Speeds', a pillar of the Safe System strategy, is often recognised as the most cost-effective strategy to pursue in areas with a high density of vulnerable road users. Again, the proposed reduced speed limit is consistent with this approach.

Impact on pedestrian and cyclist crashes and severity

Wellington's central city has the highest level of pedestrian traffic in New Zealand as well as a high number of vehicle movements, and therefore a higher likelihood of conflict between these different road users. Vehicular speed, particularly speed at impact, is widely recognised as one of the most important predictors of pedestrian and cyclist injury severity or fatality¹. 'Safer Journeys – New Zealand's Road Strategy 2010-2020' states that the probability of a fatality when a pedestrian is struck by a motor vehicle at 30 km/h is 10%, compared with 30% if struck at 40 km/h, or 50% if struck at 45 km/h. Hence a lower speed limit to reflect the characteristics of this particular environment is considered appropriate.

¹ University of Washington and US Department of Transportation (February 2007) Research Report: Managing Pedestrian Safety I: Injury Severity

Impact on vehicular traffic

We note that the proposal does not cover key arterial routes such as Waterloo and Jervois Quays, Kent and Cambridge Terraces, and SH1. With these routes retaining a speed limit of 50 km/h, faster journeys around the CBD will still be possible. This aligns with the Ngauranga-Airport Corridor Plan integrated network approach. At the same time, Wellington City Council data shows that all of the streets covered by the safer speeds proposal already have mean speeds below 40 km/h (many below 30 km/h). We therefore expect mean journey times through the CBD will see little change.

With regard to bus services the impact is likely to be minimal. The primary Golden Mile bus corridor already has a 30 km/h speed limit in effect. The impacts of the proposal for buses are therefore contained to fairly limited sections of Taranaki Street, Willis Street, Bowen Street and The Terrace. Available data indicates that buses on these affected street sections currently operate at average speeds below 30km/h. Factors such as close spacing of bus stops and spacing of signalised junctions limit the opportunity for buses to operate above 30 km/h. Implementation of priority measures for buses could however provide the opportunity to improve average bus speeds without the need to travel faster than 30 km/h.

Conclusion

While the trade-offs between pedestrian safety and motor vehicle speeds associated with this proposal are recognised, the potential safety benefits are considered to off-set any marginal impact on vehicular journey times. This proposal is therefore supported as one of a number of key measures to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety in the central city.

Signed:

Fran Wilde

Chair