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Architectural Centre submission on Draft Cycling Policy

This is a submission from the Architectural Centre, a group which represents both professional and non-professionals interested in architecture and design, and in the promotion of good design in Wellington, as well as the functional and inspirational planning of our city.

The Architecture Centre emphatically supports the Council's Draft Walking Policy, and commends the proactive position and in-depth consideration that the Council has made to improve the quality and safety of Wellington walkways. We find the breadth of the Policy to be entirely positive, and its focus on safety and increasing pedestrian commuter numbers to be a valuable aim of the Council.

Although the Architecture Centre finds the document comprehensive, we will need more explicit statements of Action and Objectives, which will elevate the Walking Policy in specificity above the appended International Charter for Walking. The Policy relies largely on quantitative data for its research and objectives, and is much less convincing regarding its statements relating to the *designed quality* of walkways. The Annual Transport Monitoring Survey and Census data are indeed valuable sources of information and feedback, and yet we continue to see unbelievably ill-designed and blatantly ugly contributions to Wellington Walkways. It often feels as though smooth asphalt is considered an adequate enough upgrade, where in fact site-specific conditions (including aesthetic and degree of safety) would easily improve this.

The International Walking Charter

We congratulate the Council for adopting this Charter: however we believe the Council should commit to "championing" this Charter, rather than (all too) simply 'adopting' it. If Wellington is indeed to lead the nation and world as a 'walking city', the Council has an opportunity to engage meaningfully (and more specifically) with this Charter. Such a public 'championing' could lead to international tourism promotional opportunities, as well as (more importantly) increasing civic pride and appreciation of Wellington's unique urban condition.

We propose that the Council start to investigate the planning of zones of pedestrian priority in the central city. At the very least, pedestrian crossing in the region of the Golden Mile and Courtenay Place **should include a phase of safe, pedestrian-only crossing**, with the current unsafe combined walking and vehicle turning scenario banished to outside the central area. Council needs to urgently walk the links from the city to the sea and observe in person the tortuous and dangerous route that pedestrians must take to cross safely from, say, Te Aro Park to Te Papa. Council should consider downgrading the roles that Traffic Planning takes in important city design situations, and at the very least, appoint a Pedestrian Planner with equal seniority to Traffic within the Council.

'Design' and 'Planning'.

The Architecture Centre notes the lack of the term 'design' throughout the Policy, and points out that pedestrian walkways should by no means be neglected by the *quality* and expert-consideration afforded by design. This has implications for creating the desirable walkways

that the Policy advocates, leading directly to the public appreciation (and use) of such spaces. 'Planning' all too often occurs at a square table, at a birds-eye scale, where pedestrian environments are reduced to the space between two thin black lines. If the Council is committed to improving these environments, designing for safety (CPTED) is one of many *design* factors which alone does not result in successful environments.

Measuring Targets.

Although the quantitative methods of data collection are suitable, we believe that if the Council is to champion pedestrian commuting (both promotion and improvement), the consultation of urban designers and architects (with urban design expertise) should no doubt be an obligation of the Council. We believe these practitioners can offer expert advice and critique of urban infrastructural design elements, in order to increase the understanding of the success of the proposals in line with the objectives set by the Policy. 'Consultation' in this case refers to the active engagement of such experts at various stages of the proposals, because better design leads to better walkways and pedestrian infrastructure.

The cited measuring devices (Surveys, Census) are too vague about the *quality* of the spaces, and indeed the public are not 'educated' suitably to critique and develop strategies for the urban pedestrian environment. These surveys are also very vague and will typically provide very unspecific results, which will only correspond to vague statements of success. These objectives should be considered too important to be discussed and concluded in such an unrewarding manner.

Suburban Centres

This is a very important Objective. We strongly recommend the Council commit to a closer examination of suburban centres immediately. By understanding and improving the quality of suburban centre's walkway conditions and usage, the public will be much more likely to foster an appreciation of pedestrian commuting, and therefore transmit this behaviour to their general interaction with the CBD. Key suburbs (Kelburn, Aro Valley, Newtown and Roseneath) also lie on the walking 'belt' determined by the 25 minute walking zone: suburbs which have been identified as key targets for increasing commuter numbers.

It is clear that very little is known about the transportation habits of those living in these suburban centres, and we strongly support the notion of closely examining these members of the public via survey. These habits are likely to be complex and changing, relative to shifting trends in living density, and of course the complexities of everyday life (weather, topography, flexibility in schedule etc), however: meaningful information must be sought.

'Turning Traffic vs. Pedestrians' & Jaywalking.

This is a critical pedestrian factor responsible for a sad number of accidents and no doubt a huge number of near-misses. The Policy identifies certain sites which are notoriously problematic for pedestrians wishing to cross (particularly at busy/major) intersections against turning traffic. We strongly recommend that these intersections are addressed immediately, where delayed turning-traffic signals or alternative measures are found to eliminate this pedestrian risk. Intersections with Wakefield and Cable are paramount to be addressed safely for the connection of the city to the waterfront.

If pedestrian crossing is made more safe and usable (related to waiting time) it is envisaged that the number of dangerous jaywalking incidents can be reduced. Insane jaywalking on streets like Ghuznee (where traffic is far too fast) and Taranaki (where the painted 'suicide strip' median lane unsafely hosts ambitious jaywalkers) can be viewed as the result of lower

quality pedestrian crossings, with an exceedingly poor service for pedestrians despite the higher than average pedestrian count. Driver inattention is likely to be a far greater cause of accidents than is pedestrian jaywalking. Generally, if the area of asphalt devoted solely to vehicle use is reduced, and pavements and medians made proportionally larger, the less likelihood there is for accidents to occur. To that end therefore we support the deletion of the left turn from Cuba onto Ghuznee, and the transformation of Taranaki St into a tree-greened pedestrian-friendly boulevard as has been previously intimated by the Mayor.

Certain suburban centres are also shockingly dangerous. Aro St for example has become a major arterial route for the Western Suburbs, with traffic moving dangerously fast on such a narrow street which hosts only one pedestrian zebra-crossing (which itself suffers from poor visibility). A number of cars (this year) have crashed or swerved over and on to the footpath near Durham Streets notorious tight bend. We see suburban arterial routes as a critical pedestrian issue which requires the prioritising of the pedestrian perspective in order to meaningfully increase the perceived (and actual) pedestrian safety and usage of suburban centre routes.

Graphics

As with other recent Policy Drafts, some of the appended visual material is far below acceptable digital resolution, to the point that vital information is illegible. This technical matter should be addressed if the data is to be engaged with and understood by readers (and reviewers) of the Policy. As mentioned in previous submissions about other issues the Architectural Centre strongly requests the council to address its lack of resolution in this regard. We stress the ethical duty that WCC has in making legible information freely available in order to conduct inclusive public consultation – the problems referred to are counter to this.

Conclusion

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the draft Walking Policy: we appreciate this aspect of the democratic process and hope our comments, observations and suggestions have been helpful to you.

If you have any questions about any of the points raised please contact me.

Yours sincerely

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The Architectural Centre