

25 October 2012
Attn: Transport Planning
Wellington City Council
P.O. Box 2199
Wellington



the architectural centre inc.
PO Box 24178 Wellington

TR70-12: Bond Street and Mercer Street - Road closure and parking changes

This submission is from the Architectural Centre, an incorporated society dating from 1946, which represents both professionals and non-professionals interested in the promotion of good design.

The Architectural Centre opposes this propose for traffic resolution on Bond and Mercer Streets for the reasons stated below.

(1) The scope of work

The Architectural Centre considers that more detailed thought (considering what these streets currently contribute, and what they might contribute, to the city) should inform a wider scope of urban design in this area, including the safety issues on Willis Street, rather than simply repainting lines in a seemingly short-term and narrowly-based solution to alleviate accidents at one spot. We consider that safety issues are likely to be interrelated rather than able to be "spot-cleaned."



In addition, the Victoria Street end of these streets engages with one of the loveliest parts of the city (with its dampled light, established grove of trees, council building colonnade, and the NZ Racing Conference Building (cnr Victoria and Wakefield St)). This could become the Parisian cafe boulevard quarter of Wellington with outdoor cafe seating among an extended grove of trees, by reducing car/bus thoroughfare, and car parking, and increasing motorbike/ scooter parking, and widening footpaths in Mercer St. We also consider that any new footpath surfacing should avoid yellow /orange brick paving, reflecting side street and urban sidewalk qualities, rather than a Chews Lane-type gentrification.

(2) The idiosyncratic nature of Bond St.

Bond Street is a unique place in central Wellington. Its combination of service lanes, loading bays, rows of taxis, and lunch bars work add to the urban texture of the city. The character of Bond Street is one which is increasingly being excluded from the city.

Chews Lane, for example, was recently gentrified, and such gentrification on a large scale will make Wellington a bland, characterless and vacuous city. The Architectural Centre believes that the current traffic structure of Bond Street is a key contributor to why its character exists. It is a street which lacks pretention and cherishes pragmatism. It is a narrow street which passively ameliorates the effects of car traffic. It is perfect as a taxi depot, cars slipping quietly in between other more prominent streets, enabling taxis to occupy and efficiently depart from their single file. We recommend that Bond St become a service lane exclusively for taxi and service vehicles, making it a well-known place to catch a cab. Bond Street could be reconfigured as a two lane queuing rank, possibly with a council charge on taxis.

(3) The functional difficulties that closing off Bond St at Willis Street will cause.

Closing off one end of Bond Street will require cars to have to turn 360° in a tight space and will undo the usefulness of the street's access to Willis St. The moving of the taxi stand will likely kill a number of businesses in Bond St, in particular the takeaway and lunch bars. We suggest that there are more sophisticated ways to prevent pedestrian/car collisions, but agree that footpath/road design which results from investigating a number of possible techniques is key to this, and encourage the Council to devote more time into researching why pedestrian/car collisions have occurred at this specific location. Possible design options or combinations include:

- (i) changes to footpath surface (rather than just colour) and/or a deeper curb (say 150mm) for pedestrians to increase their awareness at the street edge.
- (ii) speed bumps to slow cars
- (iii) shared space techniques
- (iv) refiguring the timing of traffic lights on Willis St to make it easier for taxis to enter Willis St without having to accelerate sharply or slow other traffic

In closing we would like to note that the Architectural Centre considers cities to be places of negotiation and multiple experiences. While we truly appreciate the desire for the council motivation to privilege pedestrians in proposing the closing of Bond St, we consider that the loss of urban idiosyncracies, in this case, is a risk which outweighs the need of pedestrians to exclude themselves from an awareness of their environment.

If a redesign of this space is needed it ought to alert pedestrians to the need to be aware of their surroundings. In an age where an increasing number of pedestrians are plugged into ipods, texting or tele-communicating on footpaths, techniques to increase pedestrian consciousness of their context is much healthier than isolating them further from their city environment (including streets and cars) and urban obligations.

We appreciate the this opportunity to make a submission on this proposal. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

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