Councillors' Office

Auckland Council
Te Kaunihera o Tāmaki Makaurau

Shane Ellison
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Dear Shane

RE: BLACK CARBON LEVELS ON QUEEN STREET

As a signatory to the C40: Fossil Free Streets declaration, Auckland has pledged to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions generated by transport and traffic. The transition to Fossil-Fuel-Free-Streets will occur by 1) procuring zero-emission buses from 2025; and 2) ensuring a major area of our city is zero emission by 2030.

However, one of our busiest streets - with more than 10 million pedestrians counted in 2017, records dangerously high levels of harmful air pollutants. The long-term average concentrations of Elevated Black Carbon (BC) on Queen Street are two to three times higher than in internationally comparable cities. This street sits at the heart of our city centre and is a strategic pinpoint of transformation plans – especially those outlined in the City Centre Master Plan 2040.

This morning, Council's Research and Evaluation Unit (RIMU) released *The Impacts of Transport Emissions on Air Quality in Auckland's City Centre* [TR2018/28]. The draft report, released in early November, highlighted exposure to high levels of 'black carbon', or ultra-fine particles associated with a number of health problems.

The main reason for high air pollution levels on Queen Street is emissions from transport vehicles – particularly diesel fuelled buses, which make up 12 per cent of the on-road vehicles (a higher proportion that any other Auckland road). Although many turn off near Wellesley Street, the pollution flows down Queen Street towards the densely populated waterfront area.

Downward trends in particulate and nitrogen dioxide pollutants have recently reversed and are now slowly increasing. These pollutants negatively impact the rapidly growing number of people who live, work, learn and socialise in our city centre, particularly those most vulnerable, such as older persons and those with pre-existing respiratory conditions.

We note and acknowledge *Auckland's Low Emission Bus Roadmap* and the pathway it provides to eliminating diesel buses from the city's roads, with a full zero-emission bus fleet in 2040. While we generally support the key milestones (continue low emission bus trials between 2019 and 2025, and procure only zero emission buses from 2025), we would like to see the 2040 date advanced considerably.

In addition to Auckland's commitment to Fossil-Fuel-Free Streets, there are numerous benefits to be gained from improving the air quality on Queen Street. The upcoming APEC, and AMCUP36 both provide opportunities to showcase Auckland's quality of life, and quality of environment. A prominent, popular street in central Auckland with remarkable air quality is another way for Auckland to demonstrate its enviable position in the world.

We are particularly interested in the immediate steps, or quick-wins, that Auckland can take to bring a dramatic improvement in the quality of air in Queen Street.

At a glance, these might include:

1. Reduce diesel buses - transition to E-buses faster.

Currently, a number of buses with routes on Queen Street are older, diesel-powered models (Euro III to Euro V).

Dramatic, instant improvements to air quality can be achieved through:

- A review of all service contracts, ensuring that only Euro VI buses are permitted on Queen Street
- Faster transition to e-buses (2019 from 2020)
- Removal of all non-commuter bus services, e.g. the Kiwi Experience
- Implementation of automatic stop/start technology for buses
- A review of the 'motor off' policy, reducing the time limit from five minutes of idling to one minute

2. Disincentivise private vehicles on Queen Street

Investigate removal of all short term (P15) parking bays on Queen Street (Customs Street to Mayoral Drive), which will consequently eliminate private vehicles generating congestion and pollution through parking searches and holding up bus services

This should have the benefit of reducing idling and improving the productivity of buses and service vehicles. Furthermore, modelling work undertaken with C40 in London has shown that if we remove a third of private vehicles from the city centre, nitrogen dioxide reduces by 15%, with notable social and economic benefits.

3. Reduce rat running in and around Queen Street

- Investigate removal of all right-hand turns from and to Queen Street, between Customs Street and Airedale (inclusive)
- Consider traffic flows and rat running implications around Fort Street, Fort Lane, Jean Batten Place, High Street, Darby Street, Elliot Street and surrounds
- Investigate opportunities to work with Google Maps to remove Queen Street and thoroughfares as recommended routes.

4. Reallocation of road space from parking

Following removal of short term parking, the road space can be reallocated to provide for additional pedestrian movement, parking facilities for active transport modes (bike and e-scooter share) and parking for a possible e-cargo delivery system. Examples include parking for Lime scooters, Big Street Bikers rechargery centres and general bike parking.

Next steps

We invite you to consider the above proposals and any other opportunities that you are aware of. We urge you to take immediate action to alleviate the risk of more premature deaths, contributed to by atrocious air quality on our busiest street.

Multiple and interdependent benefits result from policy decisions that promote safer streets, climate action, active and public transportation modes, and congestion mitigation strategies. These benefits include increased economic activity, vibrant social spaces and a cleaner, more sustainable environment - including cleaner air.

Finally, your strong commitment to delivering on Auckland's Climate Action Plan and the associated actions – particularly those that will be worked through as part of Auckland's Climate Symposium – is also imperative as we work together to make tangible and ambitious progress in the short and long-term.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

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