

Auckland City Centre Resident's Group

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Improving Access for Residents in the City Centre

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Hi [redacted]

Thanks again for your & [redacted] time recently. It was really appreciated as it gave us new insights into what you are expected to achieve with a system or city mobility model that is now trying to respond to an environment that has really evolved way beyond what that original model ever envisaged.

It's a model that we as residents have some pretty major issues with, as you will have no doubt gathered.

In the end all streets are public space, and how we use them is a deliberate choice. CCRG's position is Public transport, cycling and pedestrians must have priority over private transport in all transport related projects in, and around the city centre.

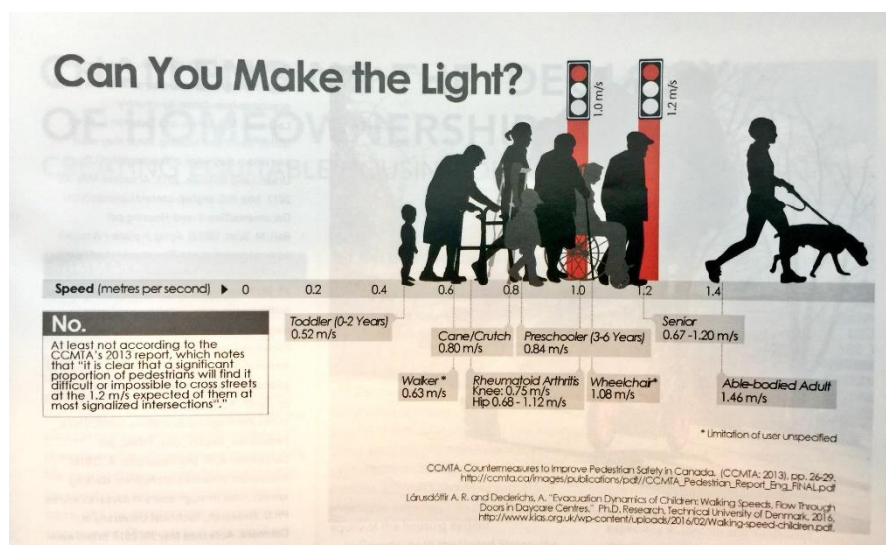
We would like to follow up here, on our meeting with you to make clear some points and ideas that came up during the meeting, as well as some ideas and requests around traffic signals that we support and inevitably, will be working towards achieving in the City Centre. No doubt many of these ideas will not be news to you!

The City Centre Master Plan

We believe that there is a clear mandate within the city centre master plan that supports our positions around prioritising pedestrians at intersections and increasing crossing times.

Outcome 7 of the plan aims for a "walkable and pedestrian-friendly city centre – well connected to its urban villages". This is perhaps not specific, but the intent is clear – walking is a priority, not an obstacle to traffic.

Outcome 3/Factor 3 (A city centre that meets the needs of a growing and changing residential population/Inclusiveness and a child-friendly city) has Target 2 which has a goal of an Increase in number of children living in city centre. We need to account for this in the phasing of



traffic lights in the city – we can no longer assume that every pedestrian is moving at the ‘optimum’ speed. We are people, not inconveniences to traffic flow. WE cannot pretend that children and the elderly do not exist – designing intersections that are known as impossible to cross for them is no longer accepted.

Target 3 clearly states a “Reduction in pedestrian waiting times at intersections”. The easy wins are the longest phases and the question we ask is, why are pedestrians considered unimportant at these intersections? We know the answer is ‘congestion’, but the city centre does not exist for free-flowing traffic, it exists for interactions between people - conducting business, shopping, going to the park with their children and enjoying life.

Crossing	Walk	Clearance	Int Cycle	Total Walk Time	Red Time	Average Delay	Cycle
Quay Street / Commerce Street	6	16	120	14	106	46.8	Long
Quay Street / Gore Street	6	15	120	13.5	106.5	47.3	Long
Hobson Street / Wyndham Street	6	14	120	13	107	47.7	Long
Fanshawe Street / Lower Hobson Street	6	13	120	12.5	107.5	48.2	Long
Wellesley Street / Albert Street	12	31	135	27.5	107.5	42.8	Long
Victoria Street / Albert Street	6	25	135	18.5	116.5	50.3	Long
Victoria Street / Federal Street	6	18	135	15	120	53.3	Long
Victoria Street / Elliot Street	6	16	135	14	121	54.2	Long
Wellesley Street / Federal Street	6	16	135	14	121	54.2	Long

The Public Realm

As noted in the City Centre Master Plan, streets are the public realm. They do not belong to motor vehicles. We are not reinventing the concept, as pedestrians and cyclists were using these streets long before motor vehicles arrived and made it often too dangerous to use most of our public realm.

Traffic signalling exists to control movement through the public realm – part of this control is to provide safe movements for pedestrians and cyclists. Treating those vulnerable users as an inconvenience or barrier to ‘traffic’ is to marginalise them and make clear that their needs and lives are unimportant. This is our fundamental position – that residents and pedestrians deserve prioritised access to and through the public realm, especially on their local streets. Vehicles in the city centre are an inconvenience to our lives, delaying us, preventing easy and quick movement in New Zealand’s largest urban centre, which also happens to be our neighbourhood. We have a massive stake in the city, more so than any car commuter. The City Centre should be a collection of our local streets, neighbourhoods, parks, friends and family, but instead the vehicle priority/speed/convenience’ model has reigned supreme to the exclusion of life in the city, with the catastrophic safety, environmental and social consequences that we see now.



We want more people on the streets, so if we don’t see enough pedestrians crossing an intersection, don’t take this as an indication of demand, rather take it as a failure of design and instead wonder where all those thousands of people are and why they are not out on that street.

Finally, considering the number of residents (and people on foot after public transport and walking in) in comparison with number of single occupant vehicles, the current prioritisation of our public realm is clearly backwards. Ruining the public realm to maintain the appeal of driving into the city is counter to the goals of any city and is contrary to Outcome 6 of the city centre master plan (“Continuing modal shift in the city centre from private motor vehicles to public transport”).

30kph speed limits

Our support for a City Centre-wide 30kph speed limit is unequivocal. For the 50,000+ residents of the City Centre, there is a strong desire and need for a sense of neighbourhood, liveable streets but above all, safety from that which is killing and injuring vulnerable users - vehicles, and vehicles going too fast. We don't accept that this can be traded off or weighed up against impacts on travel times and congestion. It is too easy to start going down that path where we end up with more hand wringing about network performance, and no action.

After 70+ years of almost complete emphasis on vehicles' never-ending, and never-satisfied needs for space, speed and vehicle priority, the pendulum needs to swing back a long way for the situation to become balanced once again. The 30kph zone is just one part of many elements supported by CCRG in the City Centre that are part of that re-balancing

Once we achieve that - many of the other elements such as pedestrian crossing timings re-balancing, reductions in, and eventually no traffic lights in the city becomes not only possible, but quite achievable. If the traffic backs up onto the motorway as a result, then consider the opportunities that that will be presented around improving the city for pedestrians!

CCRG Actions

We will work to identify any intersections that have a phase where:

- No pedestrian cycle is active at any time during the cycle
 - As you noted, timing is limited by pedestrian phase times – if no pedestrian phase is active at any point then the phase could be further optimised to reduce overall cycle time or lengthen pedestrian phases accordingly
- Beg buttons are still required to get a pedestrian phase
- Weirdness such as described crossing Hobson and Wellesley where the pedestrian phase ‘runs out’ long before it should and requires a second press to reactivate

Requests

We’d love to see some more experimentation that is outside the current mind-set, and below are some thoughts that we believe are practical and very possible:

1. No Beg Buttons at remaining intersections

Any intersections that don’t already have pedestrian phases automatically triggering need to have them implemented

2. Pedestrian Phase always on

Trial an implementation where some city centre pedestrian phases are “on by default”, that is, the pedestrian phase is green unless a car arrives at an intersection (changing to green for the vehicle after a certain threshold):

- Off peak times would be the most useful/least impacting/most likely to not be constantly cycling anyway
- Barnes Dances could be green for pedestrians:
 - if a car approaches on one side, that side gets a phase before being pedestrians again
 - if vehicles approach on both approaches, a standard phase is initiated
 - the end result is again a pedestrian phase

- Non-Barnes Dance intersections are potentially trickier – I see two options:
 - could run both pedestrian phases simultaneously, effectively creating a Barnes Dance
 - This might be confusing, but people are smarter than they look
 - pick a pedestrian direction that is most common and maintain it as green until vehicle approaches or pedestrians wishing to use the other crossing press the button
- For vision impaired users:
 - Chirps will continue as normal guiding people to the buttons
 - if the button is pressed during a pedestrian phase it will go off for the requisite time, before ceasing (regardless of the state of the pedestrian phase, which is hopefully still on)

3. Pointless gridlock cycling becomes Pedestrian Paradise

When the system gridlocks, keep pedestrian phases on until there is space for cars to move through, rather than aimlessly cycling through the car phases while pedestrians wait pointlessly, and no cars can move anyway.

This will also discourage cars blocking the intersection as there will literally be pedestrians in the movement corridor!

4. No Beg Buttons for a wider period of the day

We reiterate that there should be no need for beg buttons in the City Centre at any intersection 7 days a week, 7am to 10pm at a *minimum*.

During quiet times, there will be a delay to vehicles as ‘empty’ pedestrian cycles occur, but as discussed, the goals of the city practically mandate this, and the low volumes of vehicles means that this will not cause any disruption to the wider network anyway.

This change will re-iterate that the city is for people first, and that cars are guests and are treated as a secondary priority there.

5. Immediate phase switching on request

During off-peak periods (when beg buttons are required) we believe that pressing the button should result in the immediate cessation of traffic phases to provide the crossing. Resumption of the normal cycle would occur afterwards (with some minimum cooldown time for obvious reasons). The low volumes of vehicles off peak means that this will not cause any disruption to the wider network and it will re-iterate that the city is for people first and they can cross whenever they need to, and that cars are guests and are treated as a secondary priority.

6. Phase timing for slow users

We request that the needs of slower pedestrians and cyclists are considered for all crossings, not just fit and able users.

For us, there is undoubtedly a lot to aim for and achieve and we look forward to working proactively and productively to achieve these outcomes, and would be very keen to meet to discuss further actions.

Regards,

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Adam Parkinson

Auckland City centre Residents’ Group