

4. SKATEBOARDING, IN-LINE SKATING AND FREESTYLE BMX CYCLING STRATEGY

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Corporate Plan Output: Leisure Planning, Parks Plans and Policy Statements	

The purpose of this report is to submit for approval the Skateboarding, In-Line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle BMX cycling frequently attract controversy. However they represent important recreation activities for predominantly children and youth. Many young people choose skateboarding, in-line skating or freestyle BMX cycling as their preferred form of recreation as an alternative to conventional sport. The Council has a commitment to address the needs of young people involved in skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling under at least four existing policies; the Youth Policy, the Children's Policy, the Recreation and Sport Policy and the Community Development and Social Well Being Policy. It is therefore important that the Council proactively addresses the current and future provision for these activities.

The Council has developed a number of outdoor skating facilities in Christchurch that are available free of charge. In addition there are a small number of commercially provided skating facilities.

The Skateboarding, In-line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy was initiated to attempt to bring some coordination to the work going on in a number of different areas of the Council to further develop skate facilities. Funding has been provided for skate facilities from metropolitan budgets as well as from a number of community boards each responding to perceived local needs without there being an overview across the city.

In May/June 1999 this committee received a report outlining a process being undertaken to develop a Skateboarding, In-line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy. The outlined aim and objectives were as follows:

AIM

To develop a strategy for the provision, distribution and funding of skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle BMX cycling facilities in the City.

OBJECTIVES

- (a) To identify the possibilities and problems of different skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling user groups sharing facilities.
- (b) To identify the likely future trends in skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling participation and the implications for the Council's facility provision.
- (c) To identify the number, type and broad geographic location of required skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling facilities taking in to account the different skill levels of participants, the changing trends in the activities and the potential for use of relocatable facilities/equipment.
- (d) To develop a process that officers/community boards can use to select the sites for skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling facilities within the broad geographic locations identified.
- (e) To identify the likely issues surrounding the proposed development and location of skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling facilities and any mitigation measures or processes that have proved effective for others providing this type of facility.
- (f) To clarify the health and safety responsibilities of all potential providers of skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling facilities.
- (g) To prioritise the needs for skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling facilities within the city and to develop action plans to include funding required for the next three years.

METHODOLOGY

An independent social researcher was commissioned to prepare a draft Skateboarding, In-Line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy.

The methodology employed in developing the draft strategy aimed to make full use of the existing information resources held by the Council and its staff and of the knowledge of skateboarders, in-line skaters and freestyle BMX bikers in the city. Interviews were undertaken with 13 Council employees, relevant material already gathered by the Council was obtained and relevant literature from New Zealand and Australia was analysed. Initial consultation was undertaken with 12 key people involved in the skate/freestyle cycle scene followed by wider consultation with skateboarders, in-line skaters and freestyle cyclists undertaken at a selection of the city's skate facilities via interview. In an effort to obtain feedback from skaters who may not currently use existing Council skating facilities, questionnaires were distributed at three skate shops in the city and at a commercial indoor skate facility in Christchurch. They were also disseminated to members of a female skateboarding group.

A draft strategy was prepared with input from the Strategy Steering Group and key informants from each of the pursuits covered by the strategy. The draft strategy was circulated to the Community Boards for their feedback and input to ensure that any local needs had not been overlooked by the metropolitan approach. The comments received from the community boards and the subsequent action to be taken were reported to the Committee.

Skateboards, inline skates and BMX bicycles each have a very broad range of uses. All can be ridden in a variety of ways and for different purposes, including sporting, recreational, and as modes of transport. The strategy is focused on some but not all of these. The following activities are included in the strategy:

- Skateboarding, in-line skating and BMX riding on purpose-built transition-type and street-type facilities;
- Skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle or “trick” cycling on recreational paths and paved areas; and
- In-line hockey.

The Strategy does **not** relate to:

- Skating for transport on public roads and footpaths;
- Extreme skateboarding, in-line skating or trick cycling on street features in the urban environment that are not intended for that purpose;
- BMX riding on dirt or BMX racing of other kinds;
- In-line racing, competitive in-line speed skating or indoor figure skating.

The study is focused on the involvement of children and youth (ie up to 24 years of age) in skateboarding, in-line skating and freestyle cycling. Whilst participation in the activities is not exclusive to these age groups the activities are especially significant to children and particularly to youth.

KEY FINDINGS

- The number of skateboard participants has grown steadily during the 1990s without the peaks and troughs experienced in the 1970s and 80s.
- The types of skate activities that have shown strongest past growth and are expected to show strongest future growth are those that are easy for those at beginner and intermediate level to enjoy.
- In-line skating is expected to show particularly strong growth.
- In-line hockey has been played formally in Christchurch since 1998 and there are now approximately 400 players on the In-line Hockey Association mailing list.
- Freestyle BMX has much lower levels of participation than skateboarding and in-line skating, primarily because of its difficulty to learn and high risk of injury.

- Christchurch City Council currently provides skate facilities at: Washington Reserve, Waltham Park, Hoon Hay Park, Bishopdale Park, Thomson Park, Wycola Park, Cypress Gardens Reserve, St Albans Park, Sheldon Park, and Templeton.
- At least four privately-operated skate facilities exist in Christchurch, being an outdoor rink, an outdoor in-line race circuit and two indoor skateboard facilities.
- Strong codes of 'skater etiquette' exist at the facilities that help to minimise conflict.
- The use of bikes on skate facilities (particularly by inexperienced riders) poses the greatest risk of injury and damage.
- Skate facility users acknowledged the Council's work and considered the skate facilities in the city to be of 'average standard'.
- The overall feedback from respondents was that the number of facilities already in place or under development was about right.
- The areas most strongly requiring new skate facilities include Riccarton/Ilam/Burnside, Linwood, Richmond/Shirley, the very central city, Aranui/South Brighton and Parklands. Facilities are under development for the first two of these at Jellie Park and Linwood Park.
- Many older and more experienced skaters are mobile frequently using buses to get to skate facilities, consequently future suburban skate facilities should be designed for those at beginner and intermediate level.
- The majority of Christchurch's skate facilities consist of transition elements that, with effort put in to upgrading and the with addition of a well designed vert ramp, could serve the needs of transition skaters well.
- The demand for street skating facilities is at least as high as for transition skating facilities. However, this style of skating is not well catered for in existing facilities.
- The regular sweeping and the widening of pathways could enhance the use of Hagley Park for in-line skating.
- The development of skate paths for in-line skating in other parks would be well received.
- In general freestyle BMX riders are happy to share facilities with skateboarders and in-line skaters. However there is a need to address the health and safety concerns particularly where less experienced BMX riders are concerned.
- There is a lack of awareness, particularly amongst beginner and intermediate skaters, of the facilities available in the city.
- There is strong demand for skill development and demonstration events amongst skateboarders and good quality portable skate ramps are important in providing these opportunities.
- Female skaters have special needs primarily related to safety, which are similar to those of very young skaters.

SHORT TERM PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Objective 1. Complete Works Budgeted and Planned for 1999-2000 Year

- Completion of Stages 2 and 3 of Washington Reserve.
- Completion of skate facilities at Jellie Park and Linwood Park
- Installation of a permanent ramp to replace the temporary structure at St Albans Park.
- Upgrade the skate facilities at Hoon Hay and Thomson Parks.

Objective 2. Tune Existing Facilities into the Demands of Users and Potential Users

- Improve maintenance of facilities especially older facilities and those in less visible locations.
- Upgrade pathways in Hagley Park for in line skating and if possible develop a second in line skating path.
- Develop a high quality 'vert' ramp in a central location.

Objective 3. Provide Greater Support for Promotion of Skate Pursuits

- Production and distribution of a pamphlet on Christchurch's skate facilities.
- Greater support for skate jams at facilities and similar events for in-line skaters and freestyle cyclists.
- Promotion of skating using portable skating elements.
- Support for skills development and female skater groups.
- Enhanced safety at existing skate venues.
- Support for in-line hockey facility providers.

MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

Objective 4. Develop Street Elements at existing facilities.

- The addition of street elements to existing skate facilities.

LONGER TERM PRIORITIES

Objective 5. Develop new skateboarding and extreme in-line facilities.

- If new or large scale facility upgrades are to be developed over the next three years demand for facilities is likely to be greatest in Richmond-Shirley and Aranui-South Brighton followed by Parklands and the central city.
- The Richmond/Shirley need could be met by the further development of the St Albans Park facility.

- Further development of Thomson Park or development of a high-class facility at QEII could meet the Aranui/South Brighton and Parklands needs.

Objective 6. Development of freestyle BMX facility, subject to demand.

- Participation in Freestyle BMX should be monitored and a facility developed if demand warrants it.
- In the meantime it is recommended that BMX bikes be permitted to ride on skate facilities providing they comply with strict guidelines.

Objective 7. Develop skate routes

- Skate routes should be developed channelling skate traffic to areas where its safety and the safety of pedestrians is enhanced.

A copy of the full draft Skateboarding, In-Line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy has been circulated separately.

FUTURE WORK

There are some aspects of skateboarding and in-line skating that are not covered by the Skateboard, In-Line Skating and Freestyle BMX Strategy and which require attention. The steering group intends to turn its attention to issues surrounding the use of skateboards and in-line skates as a mode of transport and to conflict between skaters and pedestrians. The possibilities of a 'skaters code' and designated skate routes will be explored as part of this work.

Recommendation: That the Skateboarding, In-Line Skating and Freestyle BMX Cycling Strategy be adopted.