

5. INSTALLATION OF TRAFFIC SIGNALS AT THE INTERSECTION OF ACHERON DRIVE AND BLENHEIM ROAD

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the results of the consultation on this proposal, as detailed in the earlier report received by the Committee on 7 October 2003.

BACKGROUND

Details of the major features of the Acheron Drive/Blenheim Road intersection proposal were included in the 7 October 2003 report and plan.

The catalyst for this work is an application for resource and building consent for a major development in Acheron Drive and Blenheim Road. To mitigate the effects of traffic generation from the site, the developer had agreed to pay the full cost of installing the traffic signals and to reimburse the Council for all other costs (eg consultation and project management). Without the provision of the traffic signals the development cannot proceed in its present form.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

In the previous report it was emphasised that because of the proposed opening of the development (April 2004), the timeframe for consultation, letting of contracts and completion of construction were on a tight critical path.

Consultation commenced on 22 October 2003 and was based on the circulation of a publicity leaflet. The leaflet included the roading designs and a summary of the main features.

In some cases personal contact with affected business owners was made and dialogue was possible on a one to one basis. This also resulted in a better understanding of issues. Written responses to the scheme were also encouraged and these have all had a formal reply.

A total of 21 responses were received. Whilst the proposed signals are generally supported, the loss of on-street parking is a major concern to adjacent businesses and an adverse effect on cyclists was pointed out.

CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Access onto Blenheim Road via Intersection with Wharenui Road

Many submitters queried the appropriateness of establishing traffic signals at the Acheron Drive/Blenheim Road intersection when access from opposite Wharenui Road would appear more logical. In response, it was pointed out that the land opposite Wharenui Road is in private ownership and was not available to the developer for obtaining access onto Blenheim Road. In fact, many current users of Acheron Drive 'rat-run' through that private land to get back onto Blenheim Road in a city-bound direction, which is a concern for the land owner. The Council has previously considered this option but has been unable to proceed with a proposal due to the unavailability of the land.

Access onto Blenheim Road via Intersection with Acheron Drive (east)

Some submitters raised the point that access in a city-bound direction could be established elsewhere, eg at the eastern intersection of Acheron Drive with Blenheim Road. This had already been investigated during the proposal development stage but had been dismissed, as it would have compromised the current traffic signal co-ordination strategy for Blenheim Road, which can only be maintained with the proposal as it stands.

Loss of On-Street Parking on Acheron Drive

Nine of the 21 submitters objected to the loss of on-street parking on Acheron Drive. Some 20 car parking spaces will be lost with the proposal, mainly used for all-day staff parking of adjacent businesses. Whilst all commercial premises have been established in recent years, most claim that they don't have enough off-street parking spaces for both staff and customers.

With the expected level of activity, it is essential to provide a flush median on the approach to the traffic signals for queuing vehicles. It is also important to extend the flush median around the bend in Acheron Drive, so that conflicts between through vehicles and drivers turning right into the development site are minimised. Technically, the proposal as it stands provides for a sound traffic engineering solution to a given situation.

The Council has recently adopted a Parking Strategy, in which it is stated that 'traffic flow' and 'safety measures' have priority before any allocation of kerb side road space for parking (Section 4.2.6 Kerbspace Priority). Hence, the proposal complies with Council's Parking Strategy.

Provision of Traffic Signals at Acheron Drive/Blenheim Road Intersection

Eleven of the 21 submitters specifically supported the provision of the proposed traffic signals. Acheron Drive itself was a private development and the Council had been unsuccessful in trying to persuade the then-developer into creating a "user-friendlier" linking with Blenheim Road. As a consequence, city-bound motorists can reach Acheron Drive via a u-turn only (at Wainui Street), and similarly, leaving Acheron Drive intending to travel toward the city requires a u-turn at either Wharenui Road or Middleton Road.

Providing the proposed traffic signals overcomes this rather undesirable situation.

The Council may well have had to address these shortcomings at some stage in the future itself, although this project had not been identified in the capital works programme as yet.

Some submissions were very supportive of the proposal to ease access into and egress out of Acheron Drive. It should also be noted that three of the submitters in support of the traffic signal installation objected to the loss of on-street parking discussed above.

Operation of the Proposed Traffic Signals

The Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA) pointed out that it is important not to confuse motorists on Blenheim Road by the adjacent signals displaying different displays, ie one set showing a red light and the next set showing a green light. This problem will not occur, as the signals are proposed to be operated similarly to the Clyde Road/Riccarton Road/Wharenui Road intersection, where the approaches to both intersections go green at the same time.

LTSA also raised the point of the possible need for a protected right turning phase into Acheron Drive. The signals engineer proposes to operate the right turn as a filter turn and like all other intersections, the safety performance will be monitored with the appropriate steps taken if and as the need arises.

Provision for Cyclists on Blenheim Road

Blenheim Road provides cycle lanes from Curletts Road to Clarence Street, with an extension up to the railway overbridge under implementation at the moment. Generally, the cycle lanes are along the kerbside. An exception is the westbound cycle lane, which between Wharenui Road and Acheron Drive (west) widens out to also accommodate motorists turning left turning into Acheron Drive. Here, cyclists and motorists share the same lane, which is an undesirable situation for a 60 km/h speed environment.

It is acknowledged that this situation is an existing one, but the proposed development may slightly worsen the situation by potentially creating more left turning traffic using this shared lane. The internal layout of the development area strongly suggests that most of the traffic intending to go to the development will use the entrance off Blenheim Road, thus not interfering with cyclists in the shared lane. However, there will be some additional traffic using the shared lane, which will result in a declining level of comfort and safety for cyclists.

In order to mitigate this situation, it is recommended to slightly widen the road at the stopline, thus creating a cycle lane adjacent to a left turning lane. A cost-share with the developer is an option.

Public Transport Provisions

As part of the project, it is proposed to amalgamate two existing bus stops (13m and 185m west of Acheron Drive) into one bus stop (130m west of Acheron Drive). No submissions have been received on this issue. The existing bus stops are too close together. The developer is very supportive in having the relocated bus stop as close to their main entrance as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

Details of the proposal were circulated to adjacent businesses. Many businesses at the western end of Acheron Drive have been visited and the proposal discussed with them.

The existing access and egress problems are a concern for many businesses, and many appreciate that the proposed traffic signals will resolve this problem. The Council may have had to address these problems at some stage in the future itself. The catalyst for this proposal, however, comes from a proposed development, with the developer having agreed to pay the full costs as a mitigation of the effects of their traffic generation.

There is concern by adjacent businesses about the loss of on-street parking, but this is a technical requirement for providing the signals in the first place.

Without further mitigation, the situation for cyclists westbound on Blenheim Road in the vicinity of the proposed signals is likely to deteriorate slightly.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the proposed Acheron Drive/Blenheim Road traffic management plan be approved for implementation.
 2. That traffic signals be installed at the intersection of Acheron Drive (west) and Blenheim Road.
 3. That the bus stop on the south side of Blenheim Road commencing at a point 13 metres west of Acheron Drive (west) and extending for 15 metres be removed.
 4. That the bus stop on the south side of Blenheim Road commencing at a point 185 metres west of Acheron Drive (west) and extending for 21 metres be revoked.
 5. That a bus stop be installed on the south side of Blenheim Road commencing at a point 130 metres west of Acheron Drive (west) and extending for 15 metres.
 6. That a 'Give Way' sign be installed against the Acheron Drive (western end) slip lane approach to Blenheim Road.
 7. That the stopping of vehicles be prohibited at any time in the following areas:
 - (a) On the west side of Acheron Drive (western end) commencing at its intersection with Blenheim Road and extending in a southerly direction for a distance of 120 metres.
 - (b) On the east side of Acheron Drive (western end) commencing at its intersection with Blenheim Road and extending in a southerly direction for a distance of 115 metres.
 - (c) On the south side of Blenheim Road commencing at its intersection with Acheron Drive (western end) and extending in a westerly direction for a distance of 130 metres.
 - (d) On the south side of Blenheim Road commencing at a point 145 metres west of the intersection with Acheron Drive (western end) and extending in a westerly direction for a distance of 61 metres.
 8. That in addition the Committee consider a policy on street directional signs for the purposes of the next Annual Plan.