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Metropolitan Christchurch Transport Statement Stage 1 Summary Report - December 2003

Transport Alternatives

Most citizens would not choose to

walk in the wind, the cold and the rain

cycle in the wind, the cold and the rain

wait for buses in the wind, the cold and the rain

primarily because of the discomfort and also because of the longer, door-to-door traveling times compared with commuting by car.

These alternative modes of transport, even if improved, are diametrically opposed to the Council's claims to be concerned with improving the quality of life.

It is acceptable to improve these alternative facilities, for those who choose to use them, but not to put pressure on people to change from their cars to the alternatives against their will. People should be free to choose their own form of exercise - not have it thrust upon them. The document emphasizes the dangers of walking and cycling and at the same time, ironically, advances these as important transport means of the future.

There is a need for the arguments for and against alternative means of transport to be fully stated and treated more objectively with the citizens' quality of life the main consideration.

Systems Management

The city is a dynamic system and the management of the city requires skills in managing dynamic systems. These are not apparent in the proposed plan for a number of reasons.

The plan is finite and short sighted. It sees ahead only for the next 20 years, which, for anybody, is a short span of time, and the implication is that at the end of the period the situation will, because of the increased rate of growth, be even more precarious than it is at the moment but, cynically, probably someone else's worry.

In fact, what is needed is a planning process that can exist in perpetuity. Such a process would grow with, would match and would control the problem and would be equally viable at the end of the 20 year period as at any other time.

The presently proposed plan is described as responsive. This can never succeed because any response is an action after the event and what is needed here is not hindsight but foresight. What is needed is action to anticipate and ameliorate the effects of forthcoming difficulties. Responsiveness is inconsistent with vision.

Responsiveness leads to an inevitable lag between the progress of events and the actions to offset them. Responsiveness is outdated as a control mechanism. It has led to the transport problems we observe in Auckland and Wellington.

What is needed is transport planning which uses the latest thinking on dynamic systems management and control.

Economic Growth.

The plan draws, for one of its justifications, on the inevitability of economic growth. Economic growth can occur either through improved productivity or expansion of the industrial and commercial base, or both.

Improved productivity means more output per worker but it is more likely to be interpreted as more output per dollar of worker pay. Improved productivity can result from improved practices that make the worker more productive for the same effort. They can also result from more pressure being brought to bear on the worker to increase the personal output per dollar of pay.

We now have a growing workforce problem of stress-related illness. This symptom is once more at odds with any plan to improve the quality of life.

An expansion of the industrial and commercial base implies the need for more workers. The shortage of skilled labour in Christchurch has been reported. This form of economic growth makes the city larger and more densely populated. Views on the value of this consequence of economic growth are divided. For the average New Zealander, urban growth means growth in pollution - including visual pollution such as advertising, growth in crime - note the growing incidence of home security and vehicle security systems, growth in corruption, growth in vandalism and growth in congestion - including traveling times.

Behind all this there is the slow but persistent growth in fear for one's personal present and future safety.

The slight improvements in income for the average working household are little comfort in the rising tide of concern about the human environment in which we live. There is a strong need for more concern for our human environment - more so, perhaps, than the natural environment.

There are certainly grounds for concern about the simplistic following of a policy of economic growth without any serious justification. There is a good case for the true value to the citizen of economic growth to be widely and publicly debated. For the present, it seems to be more like a mechanism for further polarizing society by increasing the gap between the rich and the poor.

The council plan proudly claims, on the one hand, that we have a low level of unemployment but on the other claims credit for programmes to reduce unemployment. With an unemployment rate around 4.4%, it is of dubious value to stress the importance of lowering it much further.