

**24. SPEED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:
SPEED LIMIT REVIEW 1998**

RR 9458

Officer responsible City Streets Manager	Author Andrew Hensley
Corporate Plan Output: Traffic Signs and Markings	

The purpose of this report is to background for the Committee methodology and subsequent issues raised during the 1998 review of speed limits on selected roads in the city.

BACKGROUND

At meetings of the Hagley/Ferrymead and Shirley/Papanui Community Boards community severance issues have been raised by people concerned about their neighbourhoods which have grown up around major arterial roads. The proposed changes in speed limits along the Main North Road, Cranford Street (State Highways 1 and 74) and Linwood Avenue were a catalyst for community groups to draw to the attention of the Council problems associated with mobility and property access.

These community views were noted by the Committee when debating the proposed speed limit changes. At the Council meeting on 25 February 1999 the following resolution was adopted by Councillors:

“The investigation by the Council to address community severance issues and attention to pedestrian crossing points on the Main North Road brought to the attention of the Committee by the Shirley/Papanui Community Board.”

The following report was prepared in light of these observations by the communities affected. The methodology adopted for the City Streets Unit’s questionnaire on proposed changes to speed limits on selected roads in the city is explained, consultation and results of the information gathered set out and community severance issues addressed.

Various references have been used in the report which were gathered as part of the research carried out by the author.

INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the methodology of the 1998/1999 Speed Limit Review, including the reasoning for design and distribution decisions.

Three main issues have been raised in relation to the Speed Limit review process and subsequent implications:

1. The methods of publicity and consultation, and in particular consulting the 'local community'.
2. Following on from this, the issues of how to define a community, and who should be consulted is discussed. This highlights the difficulties in the use of such terms and in particular relates these to the Speed Limit Review.
3. Community severance is an issue that has been raised in relation to some of the proposals, and the reality of this discussed.

METHODOLOGY

A community view was obtained by utilising a variety of methods in order to gauge public opinion and gather comment.

Leaflets with a freepost response form provided the major basis of the public consultation and data gathering process, and also served as a starting point for raising community awareness of the proposals.

Two leaflets were produced, one for Christchurch West, and another for Christchurch North and East. It was decided to produce two leaflets in order to present the information to the public in a clear, unbiased and orderly fashion. The leaflets detail the proposals, and show these in a broader context with the rest of the road network. It was practical also to have all the proposals from the Halswell and Wigram listed together as Christchurch West due to their geographic proximity, and interwoven nature of these particular proposals.

This leaflet contained proposals relating to many local and collector roads. The Christchurch North and East leaflet presented proposals from two distinct areas in the city, and this has the benefit in that the leaflets were distributed between these areas, providing a truer representation of the role and function of the arterial roads under review.

2,600 of each leaflet were printed and distributed. The corresponding leaflet was delivered to all properties fronting the roads proposed, and along some side roads. The majority of leaflets were distributed in this manner. Leaflets were made available also through local community focal points such as Council service centres' and libraries, and also the Automobile Association, Regional Council, Transit New Zealand, Canterbury University, Polytechnic and Police. Leaflets were posted out on request.

Leaflets were distributed in this manner in order to achieve a potential mix of respondents that reflects the nature and function of the roads under review, and that the proposals impact on a wide range of people in society, each with differing experiences. There are major difficulties in defining who is and

who is not part of the local community, as investigated further in the Discussion section.

A variety of other methods were used. These included a newspaper advertisement with a response form in the Christchurch Star, consultation and correspondence with community interest groups, and public meetings. Three public meetings were held; in Belfast, Redwood and Linwood.

The Council released information and publicity also generated additional awareness and responses. Newspaper and circular articles stated the proposals and commented on some of the issues.

The Linwood Community Resource Centre put out two flyers, and undertook door-to-door canvassing in order to gauge disapproval for the Linwood Avenue proposal. Leaflets were distributed to publicise the Linwood public meeting. The Shirley/Papanui Community Board also undertook door-to-door canvassing to gauge disapproval.

Council staff met on numerous occasions with a group based at the Linwood Community Resource Centre to discuss their concerns.

The consultation process was undertaken in accordance with the Christchurch City Council's 'Seeking Community Views Policy (1997)'.

FINDINGS

Leaflets and Newspapers

There was an excellent response to the leaflets that were circulated, and generated much additional comment. Over 900 leaflet forms were received (which equates to a response rate of 17%, which is very high for a leaflet questionnaire), as well as letters and multiple signature responses. It became apparent that people were motivated strongly by these issues, and responded accordingly. However, the newspaper advertising generated few responses.

The results of the leaflet and newspaper consultation revealed a clear preference in favour of all the proposed changes to speed limits, and that the proposals are strongly supported. The proposals were seen as favourable and this coupled with the success of the previous round of speed limit changes is likely to have led to these results.

Not all respondents gave an answer to every proposal on the leaflet. Between 7% and 21% of the respondents had no opinion on whether or not certain speed limits should be changed. This suggests that in general people appear to have been somewhat selective in responding to road proposals in which they have some knowledge or interest in, and not simply circling answers for the sake of it.

Of particular importance and interest were the comments that were received in addition to the yes or no response. They represent a set of very real suggestions and concerns of the community comprising support, caution, additional improvements and genuine concern. These came from the 'local community' and other road users.

Public Meetings/Interest Groups

A public meeting was held on 22 June 1998 at 7.30pm at the Belfast School Hall. Approximately 30 residents attended. There was no clear indication for or against the State Highways 1&74: (Main North Road and Cranford Street) proposal. Concerns raised reflected those received from the leaflet consultation.

A public meeting was held on 8 December 1998 at 7.30 at the St. Lukes Church Hall, Redwood. It was attended by three residents.

A public meeting was held on 28 January 1999 at 5pm at the Linwood Community Resource Centre, Linwood Avenue. There was no clear indication made for or against the Linwood Avenue proposal, although there was consensus that they wanted the speeds lowered, but they could not decide on how to achieve this.

Apparently both the group based at the Linwood Community Resource Centre, and some canvassing prior to the 1998 local body elections in the Shirley/Papanui Community Board area encountered a majority of people against the Main North Road and Linwood Avenue proposals respectively. It is believed that the particular methods used in order to obtain these results played a large part in the subsequent answers received. This will be elaborated on further in the discussion section.

Much valuable additional comment and information was made on traffic and roading issues. These have been brought to the attention of the relevant Area Traffic Engineers.

DISCUSSION

Public Meetings

It is not correct to assume that all people within a community hold a uniform view, or that those attending public meetings fairly represent the community.

There are questions over whether those who attend public meetings are representative of the local community (Daff and Wilson 1996 in Ogden and Taylor (eds)), (The Institution of Highways and Transport 1997). This was evident at all three public meetings, where there was no clear decision for or against the respective proposals, but a vocal element opposed.

‘Local’ Issues

It was felt that a suitable mix of respondents was achieved through the distribution methods stated in the methodology section. In dealing with issues such as these proposals, and in particular those regarding major arterial roads, it is difficult to define when someone ceases to be a ‘local’ and when someone is part of the ‘general public’, and when an issue ceases to become solely a ‘local’ issue. These notions are becoming increasingly blurred within cities.

Some have suggested that the views of ‘locals’ are more important than those of ‘others’. Aside from the great difficulties in defining the notion of ‘local’, systems of weighting are inherently flawed, subjective and undemocratic. Who’s to say one persons view is more important than others? Where do you draw the line to define the ‘affected’ community? Is it simply those fronting the proposal, is it the side street off the proposed road, is it the road which feeds into the side road, or even the roads surrounding that? Or is it the community board area as defined on a map? All those who responded each have valid and different experiences and views of the proposals and the surrounding space. Everyone holds a piece of the truth.

Following on from the reasoning as to the mix of respondents, and the difficulties in defining ‘local’, it is in general not possible to tell exactly where each response came from, and whether they were from ‘locals’. What we do know however is that all households and businesses fronting the proposed roads, and some side streets were given the opportunity to respond. Leaflets were made available at surrounding focal points, interest groups advertised the proposals and sought comment in particular areas, and other forms of publicity coupled with providing the wider public with an opportunity to comment allowed for a wide and extensive representative consultation process.

Contradictory Results

It has been raised that the results may differ from those encountered through methods such as spot door-to-door canvassing by interest groups. This is not a surprising outcome. Consciously or subconsciously a researcher can put a slant on the issue and affect the answer given by the respondent. An example can be in the manner or wording in which the question or proposal is presented, the physical presence, and the status of the interviewer. Although these results should be given consideration, it is important to acknowledge their limitations and bias. An advantage of the leaflet consultation was that everyone was presented with the same unbiased information, and replied anonymously if they wished.

Issues of Community Definition and Division

Just who does the speed limit proposal affect? Who is part of the 'local community'? The following factors need to be taken into account when addressing issues relating to major arterials. A 'local' and 'others' dichotomy is inappropriate in these cases.

The definitions stated below, and they are by no means the only lines of definition or division, go some way to elaborate on this problem of definition: being able to call an area 'local' or a group of people 'the local community'. The terms 'local' 'neighbourhood' and 'community' illustrate the difficulties in definition: using what criteria and scale are they measured by or compared to?

Put simply, it is impossible to define a community. This concept is even more complicated when an attempt is made to draw 'meaningful' boundaries within an urban area. It is a fluid concept with many different boundaries and is subsequently highly debatable. Boundary selection of communities occurs on multiple levels along multiple lines simultaneously, and differs for different people in a city. Communities are not static, and are constantly evolving and redefining themselves. What community means has been disputed for even longer than the effects of place (Bell and Newby 1978)' (Johnston 1996a:80-81) in Johnston et al. (eds)).

'The urban community is made up of a wide range of individuals, neighbourhoods and groups' (Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner For The Environment 1998:35). Almost any local urban neighbourhood is likely to be part of a large sector of the wider community as a city is made up of an interacting network of neighbourhoods and communities. The community is not a little society but a form of social differentiation within total societies (Suttles, G. 1972).

'A neighbourhood is a defined area within which there is an identifiable subculture to which the majority of its residents conform. Many now doubt the existence of such spatially specific social units, given the general level of population mobility in cities and the myriad opportunities for social, economic and political interaction outside ones immediate residential milieu: they are certainly not easy to identify empirically' (Johnston 1996b:409) in Johnston et al (eds)).

Often the boundaries of residential groups are thought of as physical obstructions, such as which are sufficient in their own right to reduce or eliminate any interaction between residents. Physically these obstructions are barriers which reduce or eliminate communication, but it is the fears that people share about wider social differences that make these ominous and unbreachable. Main roads are an example as they are available "to

everyone”, and frequently feature as boundaries between neighbourhoods. These boundaries figure into divisions in society in which the fear of outsiders is central (Suttles, G. 1972). The issue of transport division/severance relates to the volume and behaviour of traffic, and the physical imposition of the infrastructure on a community. But this is only one of the many interacting and simultaneous lines of division/definition. Others include:

- An effective and frequent barrier between residential groups is boundaries such as those imposed on the urban landscape as an arbitrary line marked off by organisational proclamations, both governmental and commercial (Suttles, G. 1972).
- A tendency to consult other residents, and the use of personal stereotypes and those conveyed in the media is a way in which some people draw boundaries between areas.(Suttles, G. 1972).
- Price gradients which are attached to residential land usage are a form of assurance about the nature of people one can expect to move into a neighbourhood, and therefore create plausible boundaries for people to select in starting to create a durable community (Suttles, G. 1972).
- The main lines of differentiation between neighbourhoods are the same throughout the entire society: race, ethnicity, income, education etc. (Suttles, G. 1972).

Taking the range of possible boundaries and definitions into account, it is evident that the speed limit proposals are of interest to many within Christchurch. It is not possible to draw a line on a map and say that this group of people should comment and this group should not. As stated earlier, all those who responded have valid and different experiences and views of the proposals and the surrounding space. Everyone holds a piece of the truth. They are all part of the community to be consulted because of this. In the broadest sense, ‘the public’ includes all those who have an interest in the proposal, including residents and motorists alike (The Institution of Highways and Transport 1997).

Community Severance

This has been a concern that has been raised by some, that as a result of the Speed Limit Proposals, the community will be severed. As stated earlier, there are many lines of division and definition of a community. Each of these lines is a form of severance. There will always be multiple lines of definition and division through any community, in particular an urban community. They are part of human nature, are a real (if often not freely, or palatable to

acknowledge) part of society, and is often overlooked in favour of a romantic notion of a united and strong community.

Community severance divides and causes the fragmentation of communities. It adversely affects the quality of life, activities on the street and the amount of social interaction within communities (Banister, D. (ed) 1998). Transport infrastructure, particularly in urban areas, and the prevailing social and cultural factors are the major causes of severance and social division.

Community severance is therefore a result of numerous interacting factors, and not simply the result of road. Roads are a contributing factor, but this needs to be put into context with the other 'invisible' lines.

Reality

The notion of a easily defined local community operating in the 1990's, and it being divided by the speed limit proposals is emotive, and unrealistic. Community severance, due to multiple means, is a reality. It is occurring now. People do not like to acknowledge a community being divided, especially if it is along lines such as social and cultural factors which many would rather not admit to. Roads are an obvious line of division/definition as they are physical and are therefore easily identified, and thus attract much of the flak for a community that is not 'together'.

It is a reality of a major arterial road that it is surrounded by commercial and residential areas. Major arterial roads not only define the community and divide the community, but also are the livelihoods and social focal points of the community, and continue its viability. Put simply Belfast would not be Belfast without State Highway 1&74 Main North Road and Cranford Street.

It is believed that the change in the speed limit will have little impact if any on community cohesion in light of the current situation, existing differences and defining factors in the community, both socially and physically.

These proposals aim at making it safer for motorists and pedestrians alike, through the lowering of the average and 85 percentile speeds on that road, potentially weakening one of the lines of severance. Community severance resulting from transportation can be reduced through the introduction of facilities such as signal-controlled crossings (The Institution of Highways and Transportation 1997).

STATE HIGHWAYS 1 & 74: (MAIN NORTH ROAD AND CRANFORD STREET)/LINWOOD AVENUE

Pedestrian concerns have been raised by the public regarding State Highways 1 & 74: (Main North Road and Cranford Street), and also along Linwood

Avenue. They do currently limit the interaction of some and this may be improved through the implementation of pedestrian facilities.

Volumes on Main North Road and Linwood Avenue are increasing. This is an issue unrelated to the speed limit proposals. It is progress and evolution. As the volume of the road increases, social contact will decrease- that is a reality, as seen in the case study. 'Heavy traffic is associated with much less social interaction and street activity'(Tolley & Turton 1995:327) (see attachment).

Both Belfast and Linwood are presently divided and defined apart from the roads, whether people will admit this or not, and that these proposals will do little to further divide the 'communities'.

RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSION

Although there was a clear preference in favour of all of the speed limit proposals, the expressed views and concerns are important, and should be given due regard and further analysis, in particular, to potentially enable these proposals to be more successful.

The issue of community severance is believed not to be directly related to the speed limit change proposals, and is instead linked to changes in traffic volume and driver behaviour, and the prevailing social and cultural factors. It is believed that these speed limit change proposals will have little impact, if any, in the area of community cohesion and severance, and may in fact improve the current situation of division/severance through more uniform traffic behaviour. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposals will have an influence on the volume utilising the particular road.

Community severance is an issue in which the Christchurch City Council should investigate further in order to establish its effect, extent and impact. In relation to traffic projects, care must be given to reflect community views. It should also be acknowledged that it is also a characteristic of an evolving urban community. In this regard the City Plan needs to reflect the aspirations of communities both urban and rural.

The investigation of implementing crossing facilities in Belfast and Linwood Avenue should be carried out in order to ease the movement of people, regardless of the speed limit proposals. The crossing facilities are currently required, and in practice the speed limit proposals will not give reason to add to these concerns. They are concerns now.

The implementation of pedestrian facilities could improve the public perception of the roads under review, of the community consultation process, and of the Christchurch City Council in general, and may go some way in slowing the advancement of community severance and neighbourhood and

community redefinition. In reality, the latter is largely determined by other numerous and stronger factors as previously mentioned in this report.

The issue of transport division/severance relates to the volume and behaviour of traffic, and the physical imposition of the infrastructure on a community. These are a reality of major arterials, in our city as well as those in other major urban centres in New Zealand. This is however a different issue to that of speed limit changes, and this must be recognised.

Past experience of speed limit reviews have shown that average and 85th percentile speeds have fallen, and traffic is travelling in a more orderly fashion, making it safer for motorists and residents alike. It is believed that the proposals will be of benefit to residents and motorists alike by providing a safer and more orderly traffic environment in which to interact.

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- Recommendation:**
1. That the information be received.
 2. That, in association with Transit NZ, a further report be generated on how pedestrians can be assisted in crossing Main North Road through Belfast and the four lane sections of Linwood Avenue south of Chelsea Street.

**Chairman's
Recommendation:** That the above recommendation be adopted.