

14. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS WAY POLICY DEVELOPMENT

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The purpose of this report is to inform the Council of the proposed development of a policy to formalise closure procedures for pedestrian access ways.

BACKGROUND

The City Streets Unit maintains approximately 230 pedestrian access ways. These are in addition to walkways through reserves. The predominant function of these access ways is to support pedestrian activity by reducing walking distances in communities by linking roads. In recent years the Council has received requests (approximately two per year) to close pedestrian access ways. Currently the Council does not have a guiding policy or procedure for dealing with such requests.

THE PROPOSAL

To undertake the development of a policy for the City's pedestrian access ways that will:

1. Outline procedures to be followed for dealing with requests for closure by the public.
2. Provide a policy/good practice guide for the formation of new access ways and improvement of existing access ways.

Two initial meetings have been held between John Doyle (NZ Police), Dean Leabourne (Christchurch Safer Community Council), Heather Wallis (Planning Policy) and Michael Thomson (City Streets). The purpose of these meetings was to discuss what kinds of issues are involved with Christchurch pedestrian access ways, what information would be useful in a policy and what information is available. John Doyle advised that 19 incidents in access ways were recorded in Christchurch over the past five years. It is with the support of the NZ Police and Christchurch Safer Community Council that this proposal is put forward for consideration.

THE ISSUES

Pedestrian access ways (PAWs) can be defined as "A linkage between two streets, or through an area of open space predominantly used by pedestrians".

Purposes include:

- Short cuts (eliminating additional distance along streets) to shops, community facilities, schools, cycle lanes, bus routes
- Increased safety for children travelling to/from school (the route may eliminate the dangers of negotiating crossings at major intersections and property accesses)
- Provides open space, thereby breaking up the urban form
- Encourages walking as distances would be shorter to some destinations
- Provides access to easements such as power, water and sewerage
- Improved access for a variety of users (cyclists, pedestrians, skateboarders, mobility impaired)
- Providing routes for pedestrians and cyclists that reduce their need to travel along collector or arterial roads

Those who gain the most benefit from the existence of PAWs are the elderly and children who often have more limited transportation options.

The main concerns that lead to requests for the closure of PAWs include:

- Graffiti
- Damage to property (eg boundary fences)
- Anti-social behaviour
- Amenity (eg litter, dog faeces)
- Safety concerns
- Noise
- Infrequent use
- Other hazards (eg broken glass)

CURRENT PROCEDURES

The City Streets Unit currently deals with petitions or requests for the closure of a pedestrian access way. Upon receipt of a closure request, a process of investigations into the use of the access way is undertaken and generally includes a survey of use, a public meeting, a report with a recommendation and resolution presented to the Community Board. Community Boards now have delegated authority to determine whether an access way should be closed. A recommendation from the Community Board is then put to full Council. Currently this process does not have a set of indicators or formal procedures to guide the decision making at Community Board level to ensure consistent decision-making is being undertaken citywide. Approval of a policy from the Sustainable Transport and Utilities Committee would promote consistency at Community Board level.

SUPPORTING POLICIES

Christchurch City Council Pedestrian Strategy (CCCPS)

Christchurch City Council is strongly supportive of initiatives to increase pedestrian activity. In February 2001 the Pedestrian Strategy for Christchurch City Council "A Step in the Right Direction" was released. The policy statement of this document is:

"The Christchurch City Council will work to create a City in which:

- the pedestrian environment is friendly, safe and accessible
- more people walk, more often
- all pedestrians are able to move about freely and with confidence (page 4, CCCPS)"

Pedestrian activity is regarded as beneficial to health and community cohesion. Within the Pedestrian Strategy the benefits of walking to individuals, community, environment and transport are outlined (pages 6 and 7 CCCPS). Some barriers to pedestrian activity are identified as safety, an unpleasant environment, lack of continuity of routes and cars driving out of driveways. Pedestrian access ways are not always considered safe or pleasant but they do provide important links in the wider pedestrian network and remove many of the on-street barriers for at least a portion of a pedestrian's journey. Reducing barriers created by some of the above factors is part of the purpose of pedestrian access ways and their use and existence supports the policy statement. Pedestrians are very vulnerable in the road environment with pedestrians making up to 25% of the road crash fatalities in Christchurch. Therefore providing alternatives that can help reduce the exposure of pedestrians to the road environment should help reduce their exposure to risk.

The Christchurch Road Safety Strategy (CRSS) 1997-2005

The facts:

- Most pedestrian road crashes involve 5 to 9 year olds, 15 to 24 year olds and over 70 year olds
- 80% of pedestrian crashes occur on arterial or collector roads

Goal: Safe facilities developed for pedestrians so that pedestrian risk is reduced and walking is perceived as a safe mode of travel (page 28, CRSS)

Therefore, in order to increase the safety of pedestrians it is essential to reduce their exposure to risk, especially from arterial or collector roads as these are areas with the greatest casualty rates.

Proposed Christchurch City Plan

The Proposed Christchurch City Plan supports the provision of pedestrian facilities and increased pedestrian movement within the city.

As part of the overall transport system, pedestrian activity is promoted with links in subdivisions seen as a means of encouraging increased pedestrian activity. Some of the reasons stated for supporting the introduction of pedestrian links in new subdivisions include:

- reducing motor vehicle trips
- where provided in conjunction with reserves they can create a "green artery" through the local area
- encourage the use of public transport
- improving open space and amenity

The support for walking and cycling in the City Plan is further strengthened by the important short cuts, links, and off road options presented by pedestrian access ways.

Proposed Regional Land Transport Strategy

Walking is identified as one of the key alternative modes supported by the draft Regional Land Transport Strategy 2001. The overall goal is for the support of walking but the methods to be used to achieve this can be directly influenced by the retention and creation of pedestrian access ways.

The two methods are as follows:

- 1.1.2 provide for the development of networks of routes and destinations- including the links around schools, urban and town centres and transport interchanges-where the needs and safety of pedestrians will be given priority.
- 1.1.3 provide for the development of more direct, safe and secure walking routes, particularly in and around town centres and local neighbourhoods, to reduce the actual walking distance between land uses, and to public transport.

SUMMARY

A commitment to safe and accessible communities through the promotion of walking has been expressed at both a regional and local level. Pedestrian Access Ways make a significant contribution to that commitment. Therefore careful consideration should be given to these agreed objectives and policies when they are challenged through requests for closure. The development of guiding procedures to be followed for both the closure and establishment of PAWs would ensure that consistent decisions based on agreed principles are being made throughout the city.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Committee approve the development of:
 - (a) A Pedestrian Access Way Closure Policy.
 - (b) A Standard of Good Practice for new access ways and improvement of existing access ways.
 2. That the Committee invite two representatives from all Community Boards to a seminar with the Committee to discuss the above.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.