

NZ Automobile Association Canterbury/West Coast District Council
LTCCP Submission.

CITY TRAM ROUTE EXTENSION CONSULTATION

The NZAA represents 1.2 million motorists and representatives will be available to further discuss this submission at the hearings.

- Extension of the tourist tram route is supported but the intention of the council to use it to further slow traffic and increase congestion in the central city is opposed.
- Continuing the deliberate clogging of the arteries will eventually kill the heart of the city as well as unnecessarily increasing wastage of fuel and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Successful revitalisation of the city centre requires a reversal of the policy to restrict and discourage private vehicle visits.
- Buses and bicycles are not a practical or attractive alternative for the majority of potential private visitors to the central city.
- The world experience is that traffic congestion is a problem that cannot be solved, only mitigated, and it should not be the Council's policy to deliberately create it.

While the Canterbury and West Coast District Council of the NZAA sees no serious problems with the extension of the tourist tram operation, we are concerned about the expressed intention to link it with a Council strategy to further slow traffic in the central city.

The policy of deliberately slowing traffic movement to maximize the already unacceptable congestion will unnecessarily increase wastage of fuel and greenhouse gas emissions and further damage the efficiency of the city's economy contrary to the aims and objectives expressed in the City Plan and the Government's "Vision" for the transport sector as expressed in the NZ Transport Strategy 2008.

Traffic is the 'bloodstream' of commerce. Obstruct it and the heart of the city will ultimately suffer a 'coronary'. If the desired revitalization of the central hub of Christchurch is to be achieved there must be a continuing and even enhanced ability to move volumes of traffic into around and out of the city in addition to having user-friendly shared space.

The trick ultimately will be to get the balance right. If the tram network becomes too extensive, it may become an obstructive 'toy' blocking the arteries of the city and killing its heart.

If a commercial area is to retain life and support viable businesses, both adequate access and parking are required for the customers/clients and the delivery vehicles; particularly trucks and couriers; that service those businesses.

Furthermore, unrestricted access is needed for emergency services (fire, police and ambulance) - any traffic slowing or intentional congestion that hinders these services is unacceptable both to the viability of the healthy functioning of the city and the safety of its citizens.

The AA supports adequate provision being made for cyclists and pedestrians but not at the cost of the efficient movement of the vast majority of vehicular traffic. We believe there has to be a mix of roads that move volumes of traffic into/out of all areas with minimal friction (cholesterol free arteries), as well as safe, liveable areas that will encourage people to live/work there. Too much of one or the other will be unhealthy. Too much tram track and slow moving trams in a confined area will simply increase congestion and access to the inner city. The planning and installation of the tram tracks and their use must be in balance with the ease of accessibility for other traffic and safety considerations.

The 2008 Transport Strategy states that the transport sector must find affordable ways to support the economic transformation of New Zealand and improve the health, safety, security and accessibility of New Zealanders, while at the same time addressing climate change and other environmental impacts.

To “ensure environmental sustainability” the Government’s target is to halve the per capita greenhouse gas emissions from domestic transport by 2040, and reduce the average CO2 emissions of light vehicles entering the fleet to 170 grams CO2 per kilometre by 2015, with a corresponding reduction in fuel consumption. The simple fact is that all cars, commercial vehicles and buses caught in stop/start or slow moving traffic streams use far more fuel and emit more CO2 than the Government’s targets.

Using traffic management methods to slow traffic may result in not only a reduction in the number of trips made in private vehicles by discouraging people from visiting the central city (choosing instead the suburban Shopping Malls) but also make all the trips longer than they need to be; so there will be no environmental gain.

The encouragement of the use of public transport, cycling, walking, and other shared and active modes is considered to be important in reducing congestion, fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. This is desirable BUT will cater only for the few. For most of the city’s population they will remain either impractical or unattractive options. Any policies of deliberately refusing to cater adequately for private motorists is not going to encourage them to use buses or bikes or to walk where such options are simply not viable.

Good connections enhance choice, support social cohesion, make places lively and safe, and facilitate contact among people. Quality urban design recognises the importance of transport networks in connecting and supporting healthy sustainable neighbourhoods, towns and cities. Urban areas with good connections between activities and careful placement of facilities can benefit by reducing travel distances and lowering the environmental impacts of transport modes.

Before considering investment in new infrastructure, cost-effective measures should be implemented to achieve maximum efficiency from any existing network, and to address localised traffic bottlenecks, rather than creating new ones. This should provide a far better benefit cost outcome.

The 2008 Transport Strategy seeks improved, reliable access to the facilities and activities that enable all New Zealanders to participate fully in society and the economy.

Like many urban areas Christchurch has developed around widespread ownership and use of the private car and, indeed, some retail and other facilities are difficult to access without a car. Congestion in urban areas, a consequence of increased travel demand, can also limit accessibility. Sometimes, participation in economic activity hinges on the cost of travelling to and from work relative to earnings. If travel consumes too much of a worker's resources (money and time), transport can create a 'poverty trap' for poor households and any increases in transport costs will exacerbate this situation.

As one of the smallest and least populated lands on the planet it could be considered an indictment of our traffic planners that world class congestion has already been achieved in Christchurch and other major New Zealand cities. The experience of overseas travellers is that traffic moves a lot more freely and speedily in much larger cities in North America and Europe than in the streets of inner Christchurch. Round the world in much larger cities the various schemes introduced to reduce both congestion and pollution have achieved mostly marginal degrees of success and some have proved to be almost totally futile.

So congestion is a problem that cannot be solved by traffic management method, only partially mitigated at best, and it should not be the Council's policy to deliberately create it.

It has been estimated by the New York Transportation Council that that the value of time wasted in traffic in Manhattan each year exceeds \$1.5 Billion. Mayor Michael Bloomberg has proposed charging motorists more than \$25 a day to enter Manhattan.

Congestion charging was introduced in central London in 2003 after the average speed of traffic had fallen to below three miles an hour. It required drivers to pay the equivalent of \$20 per day if they wanted to drive around the London CBD during the scheme's hours of operation. It was aimed at encouraging or persuading people to choose other forms of transport such as buses or cycles or the underground. Any vehicle moving within the zone is monitored by more than 200 fixed and mobile CCTV cameras.

There was an initial 21 per cent reduction in traffic entering the zone, but today the congestion could be described as worse. Since the congestion pricing scheme began, the increase in driving speeds has been measured at just 0.6 miles per hour. But the annual cost to motorists is now more than \$500 Million of which more than three quarters is absorbed by the 'administration' costs of the scheme. This prompted London Mayor Ken Livingstone to increase the fees (which possibly helped provoke the voters to reward him with an 'unplanned retirement').

In Sweden, Stockholm has created a 'Congestion Zone' which was called for by popular vote. But while residents in the inner-city areas were in favour of congestion charges, those who commute from the outlying suburbs were not. Since the introduction of the charge, inner-city traffic appears to have reduced by some 18 per cent, but another result has been more traffic congestion outside the zone, and a significant increase in household commuting costs.

Germany has 12 implemented congestion zones with another 9 planned, but the German motoring club, the ADAC, has described them as confusing and has mounted legal action against the Government.

In Barcelona, Spain a congestion policy was introduced in 2007 which reduced motorway speeds from 120km/h to 80km/h. But monitoring has indicated that congestion has subsequently increased, and emissions are up too.

The Government's transport planners are presuming that encouraging a substantial shift to walking, cycling and electric vehicles will be the magic solution to New Zealand's traffic troubles, but overseas experience indicates such expectations are most unlikely to be fulfilled. In fact our needs for transport are projected to grow at an even faster rate than our population which will effectively compound already existing traffic congestion problems in many of our urban communities if we do not adopt radical new approaches to how we plan, build, work and live in our cities and towns.

Until recently it was widely believed that "peak oil", "global warming" and the Emissions Trading Act will substantially solve our traffic congestion problems by making the use of fossil fuel powered vehicles prohibitively expensive; but the presumption that the only way energy prices will move in future is up has now been shown to be totally fallacious. Back in 1985, in inflation-adjusted dollars, the cost of petrol in New Zealand rose to more than \$2 a litre but in the fifteen years following it fell to almost half that. Just recently the world price of oil was artificially inflated to a level above \$140 but has since fallen by around a third and could continue to drop in the current world economic climate.

There are known oil shale reserves in Canada and Australia which could meet current fuel needs for decades if not hundreds of years and right here in New Zealand the relatively easy conversion of our vast coal reserves in Southland into liquid fuel could keep all our cars and trucks on the road for another century or two.

Furthermore dramatic improvements in vehicle technology and alternative motive power will ensure that the motor vehicle – in whatever form it may take – will be with us and need to be catered for for many years to come.

Thus it would be foolish for any local body to plan its roading networks with the expectation that rising energy costs and carbon offset trading schemes will make the private use of motor vehicles increasingly unaffordable and curb traffic growth.

There is already research that a significant number of retail shoppers from remote suburbs drive around or past the central city to reach the more popular suburban malls on the other side of town. Slowing traffic and increasing the congestion in the central city to inconvenience private motorists and the considerable light service vehicle fleet, will serve only to enhance the attraction of the suburban Malls with a consequent increase in traffic movements across the city-wide roading network. The use of planning restrictions on new retail developments or the proposed penalising of parkers in suburban malls will not help in revitalising the central shopping area if the arteries feeding the heart of our city are deliberately kept clogged and congested.

Roy Hughes
District Councillor