

Cycle Aware Wellington
PO Box 27120
Wellington 6141
info@caw.org.nz
ph 04 463 5785



CAW submission on draft Hutt Corridor Plan June 2011

Cycle Aware Wellington Inc (CAW) advocates for everyday cycling in the Wellington region, and has a mailing list of over 500 members.

The **key points** of the submission are:

- The Ngauranga to Petone walkway/cycleway upgrade needs to be approved, and the investigation stage brought forward to 2011, with implementation starting in 2012
- Efficient cycling connections north from Petone need to be provided.
- The Plan should emphasise better use of the existing roading network, and improved public transport and walking/cycling infrastructure, rather than building new roads.

Introduction

We are pleased that an objective of the Hutt Corridor Plan (the Plan) is to "Increase trips made by walking, cycling and public transport", and that this includes plans to

- Improve the walking and cycle way between Ngauranga and Petone
- Upgrade Hutt River trail between Petone and Upper Hutt
- Create a cycle and walk way between Upper Hutt CBD and local schools
- Create a 'Beach to Bush' walk and cycle way at Petone

We support the concept (p15 of the Plan) of a good quality off-road strategic north south link through Hutt Valley and along harbour edge between Petone and Ngauranga, as well as improved local cycling facilities.

We also note the concern in the plan for network resilience (p.16). The Christchurch earthquake has demonstrated that bicycles become an important transport mode in the event of a disaster such as an earthquake, and we see this as an additional reason for cycling to be regarded an important mode of transport in the plan.

Ngauranga to Petone walkway/cycleway upgrade

The single most important aspect of the Plan is the urgent implementation of the Ngauranga to Petone walkway/cycleway upgrade. This was ranked as the highest priority cycling project in the 2011 CAW survey on improving cycling infrastructure (451 responses). The upgrade is important to allow comfortable and attractive bicycling between two major regional centres, and as the Plan notes, is of strategic importance in providing a cycling network for the region. The Plan states (p5) that 70% of people commuting into Wellington come from Hutt Valley. If this commute has a cycling option that is perceived as convenient and safe, a significant number of that 70% could be attracted to commuting by bicycle.

The current cycle path is impractical and rarely used. It is too narrow to maintain properly, littered with debris, and only an option one way (Petone-Ngauranga) since the Petone -Horokiwi section is on expressway shoulder.

An upgraded Ngauranga-Petone walk/cycleway could be an attractive cycling route, despite being beside a railway line. The recently implemented Mana-Plimmerton walkway/cycleway is an attractive route despite being between the rail line and the sea, and is similar to the route proposed between Petone and Horokiwi. The Hutt Road cycle path between Ngauranga and Thorndon is used heavily by bicycle commuters, despite being an inadequate facility. This indicates that an improved cycle path between Petone and Ngauranga would attract users.

Jackson Street to Lambton Quay is only 11km, or half an hour cycling (GWRC Journey Planner, average speed) making it a practical trip for commuters of average fitness. Currently over 400 cyclists a day travel the route, despite having to travel on the shoulder of the SH2 expressway. It is likely that an upgraded route would attract significant numbers of cyclists. A survey of staff at one Hutt Valley organisation, the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, indicated that staff who currently cycle between Wellington and Avalon would feel more confident if an improved separated bicycling route was available, and that there were a significant number who would switch to commuting by bicycle if there was a separated cycle path between Petone and Ngauranga.

The Ngauranga-Petone walk/cycleway has a high benefit/cost ratio: at least 3.1 and probably higher, derived from: reduction in congestion from increased cycle commuting, health benefits from use of more sustainable transport, increased safety, tourism benefits etc. An additional benefit is that the Ngauranga-Petone walk/cycleway will provide a protective buffer from waves (which can be a factor in disrupting rail travel in southerly storms) for the railway line between Petone foreshore and Horokiwi.

While the proposed walkway/cycleway appears expensive, the investigative phase should look at technologies that might make it cheaper. Automatic gates could be used on a level rail crossing at Horokiwi. Cycle detectors as used on SH2 shoulder could operate one way sections of cycle path that are too narrow for cyclists to pass comfortably. Rather than reclamation on the coastal section, alternative constructions such as a boardwalk may be more economic, although of less benefit in protecting the rail line.

Long term, a cycle route on the seaward side of the railway from Petone to Kaiwharawhara should be investigated. For much of the distance, there are existing maintenance tracks or land between the rail/motorway and the sea, and reclamation/boardwalks may be only required for as little as 2km.

Other cycling issues in the Plan

Viable cycling routes north from Petone need to be provided, both to attract new and recreational cyclists who need routes with a high degree of perceived safety, and to cater for experienced commuting cyclists, who need fast direct routes. Currently the route north from Petone to Melling on SH2 is not satisfactory for either group- the Dowse and Petone interchanges make little provision for cyclists - but the planned alternative of upgrading the Hutt River Trail does not provide a direct route between Petone and Hutt. Connections to Petone and Hutt need to be considered as part of the implementation of the Ngauranga to Petone walkway/cycleway upgrade.

Although outside the area considered by the Plan, the cycling route between Ngauranga and Wellington City is a critical part of the transport network, and urgently needs to be made safer.

We welcome the Plan's commitment to improved local cycling facilities. The Plan should encourage use of bicycles for short trips within the corridor - a high proportion of vehicle trips in NZ cities are less than 5km which is a feasible cycling distance.

While we support the Plan's emphasis on improved public transport, we believe there should be more emphasis on integration of bicycles with public transport: more flexibility to carry bicycles on trains, bicycle racks as standard fittings on buses. The aim of the transport network should be to get people from point to point rather than between transport termini. The combination of bicycles with public transport is one of the most effective ways of achieving point to point transport.

General transport issues

We believe that the Plan puts too much emphasis on new road capacity: climate change, more expensive fuel, and city congestion means that our transport systems should not be designed for individuals travelling in private motor cars.

Investment in cycling infrastructure is likely to be of more long term benefit to the transport network than investing in roading. A report by Hyder Consulting (Money 2009) indicated that:

- Better use of existing transport networks is more productive than expanding capacity.
- Small changes in nominal vehicle numbers (for example from car to cycle commuting) produce significant changes in congestion.
- Improved cycle facilities (such as the Ngauranga-Petone cycle path) are a relatively low cost option for achieving shifts from private motor vehicles.

The Plan should focus on making existing road capacity work well for all users, including cyclists, through minor fixes (e.g. the cycleway from Petone to Ngauranga and on to Thorndon), traffic management methods, and development of public transport.

The Plan should match the draft Regional Passenger Transport Plan network design approach, but with the key change of putting the Rapid Transit Network through the Lower Hutt CBD. This could include moving Melling Station a bit south and connecting it by a pedestrian bridge to the CBD (and shifting the civic centre that way), and a light rail connection across the river and ultimately to Waterloo to create a loop. The rail line between Trentham and Upper Hutt should be double tracked, to increase reliability on the whole line.

Conclusion

We see the Plan as an opportunity to fix an urgent problem: the lack of a good cycling connection between the Hutt and Wellington. In addition, we hope the Plan will be used to implement high quality cycling routes through the Hutt Valley.

Reference:

Money, Chris. 2009. Importance of network optimisation in promoting productivity: a value for money approach. Wellington: Hyder Consulting. Available from <http://can.org.nz/node/5392>