

Submission to Wellington City Council on Central City Safer Speed Limit

From the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities, University of Otago, Wellington
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Summary

1. As an inter-disciplinary research centre that is dedicated to improving our urban centres, the New Zealand Centre for Sustainable Cities would like to thank the Council for giving us the opportunity to make this submission, and offer our wholehearted support for the Central City Safer Speed Limit proposal.

Health benefits from lowering the speed limit

2. Experience and research from New Zealand and around the world has shown that lowering the speed limit from 50km/h to 30km/h reduces the number of vehicle accidents at both high and low speeds in the area concerned, as well as reducing the severity of those accidents. Serious accidents in towns in Germany have been reduced by more than 70% as a result of this speed limit change. Casualties in London were reduced around 40% following the introduction of 20mph (32 km/h) zones (Grundy, Steinbach et al. 2009). This makes the streets safer and more enjoyable for the most vulnerable road users, pedestrians and cyclists, as well as safer and less risky for car drivers (European Federation for Transport and Environment 2001). In terms of accidents involving pedestrians, a reduction in speed limit to 30km/h is estimated to give a pedestrian a survival rate of approximately 90% if they are hit by a car driving at the speed limit (Ministry of Transport 2010). This is at least five times better than the survival rate estimated for a collision at 50km/h (Rosén and Sander 2009).

Further benefits

3. The Transport Perceptions Survey 2012 conducted for the Greater Wellington Regional Council has shown that Wellington City residents feel that cycling is unsafe in the city. It also states that 58% of respondents who reside in Wellington City agree that lowering the speed limit is a good option to make cyclists feel safer (only 26% disagreed), which is likely to attract more people to cycling (Research New Zealand 2012).
4. There are also a number of other benefits to reducing the speed limit to 30km/h in the Central City, including reduced fuel and vehicle operation costs for drivers, reduced emissions and other pollution from vehicles, and reduced vehicle noise in the city (European Federation for Transport and Environment 2001; Archer, Fotheringham et al. 2008; Woodcock, Edwards et al. 2009). For example, traffic tends to move more smoothly at around 20-30 km/h, reducing stop-start pollution. These benefits will create a more liveable, cleaner and pleasant central city for both the residents of Wellington and the many visitors who come here, which will boost retail sales in the CBD. We believe that this proposal will make Wellington a more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable city.

Extension of the safety zone

5. We would encourage the extension of the 30km/h zone to the south, to include Abel Smith Street and the roads between this street and Vivian Street but not Vivian Street (SH1) itself. There are a number of popular bars, restaurants, shops and residences in this area and many pedestrians use these streets. Including this area will further increase the benefits to the city.

Conclusion

6. Given that the safer speed limit proposal is likely to have minor effects, if any, on overall vehicle travel time, but is likely to bring significant safety, health, environmental and wellbeing benefits to the city, we believe it is justified and should be accepted by Council.

References

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