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Waka Kotahi – Reshaping Streets Proposal

By email: reshaping.streets@nzta.govt.nz

About the Chamber

The Wellington Chamber of Commerce and Business Central (the Chamber) is a business membership association, representing around 3,600 members throughout Central New Zealand (Gisborne to Taranaki and down to Nelson). We have represented business in the Wellington Region for 165 years, and advocates for the interest of business, and the development of our region's economy.

The Chamber works closely with local and central Government to ensure Wellington's business community is consulted on the changes that impact them. Our advocacy remains consistent, and we continue to play a constructive role in the future development of our city.

Our Comments

The Chamber writes to offer constructive feedback on the Reshaping Streets Proposal (the Proposal) and comments specifically in relation to Wellington.

We endorse attempts to reduce regulations and red tape for new infrastructure projects. Doing so will reduce the costs on tax and ratepayers, and by extension lower the costs on business. New infrastructure projects being built faster and more affordably has the strong support of the business community.

However, the Chamber wishes to express concern about the intent of the Proposal. The goal of transport changes should be to improve efficiency and help us get around, not slow us down. Transport should be more reliable, central cities more accessible. The Reshaping Streets Proposal, in its current form, will not achieve this.

There is little mention in the consultation document of helping people get to work faster, find a park when they travel to central cities, or help businesses get their product delivered on time. Instead, the proposal is focused on delivering outcomes that businesses largely do not want and removing their ability for recourse when this happens.

The Proposal is not a neutral effort to cut red tape and over-consultation on new infrastructure projects. Its stated aims are to slow down streets, remove carparks, and make doing business harder. There may be merit to these changes in certain circumstances, but

they should be treated equally to other changes to speed up traffic flows and make cities more accessible to vehicles.

There is an inconsistency from the Government in its approach to Council authority. Councils are in the process of having their control over various services reduced – from water to planning and resource consents. Yet the Proposal passes complex integrated traffic systems down to the Council level. By its own survey, Wellington city has a 12 per cent approval rating of its decision-making ability so we have real concerns about the proposal.

Some of our concerns are that the attempted sanctions and inconveniences for travel by car created by initiatives such as Reclaiming Streets are not offset by real incentives to replace them. In the case of Wellington, the proposed travel solutions for inner Wellington travel are promised in the year 2035 at the cost of more than \$7b (in today's dollars).

We have concerns that New Zealand is not receiving enough cost-effective imported electronic vehicles when acquiring them is a real priority for business, families and the environment. Making driving less attractive will only worsen this trend. Our view is that the Proposal, despite appearances, is not enhancing life for ordinary people. Logistics of life for a business or family are likely to be made more difficult.

The current intent of the Proposal raises concern among the business community. In Wellington, we have seen the impact of carpark and loading zone closures on business, and on commuter times. Neither are positive.

We have also seen the impact of a trial and consultation system that imposes change on communities, rather than hearing their concerns. Opaque consultation and decision-making can cause a power imbalance and a larger breakdown in relations between business and local Councils. Who parks, where they park, and how long they park may be the entire basis for business models. Changing these, particularly at short notice, can leave businesses in the lurch.

Many decisions at local Council level have been aspirational and ideological which are framed as achieving better outcomes for communities. Businesses have used the consultation process to voice concern about these decisions, but without a neutral consultation process, we risk seeing damaging decisions being made.

In our recommendations, we outline ways in which the Proposal can be amended to limit the negative impact on businesses. However, while the intent remains to slow down traffic and remove parking, without consideration of other design options, the Proposal will likely have a negative impact on Wellington businesses.

Our Recommendations:

- The Chamber endorses recommendations made by the Property Council and InfrastructureNZ to shorten the maximum pilot trial period from two years to 12 months. The 12-month period allows for infrastructure to be trialled across seasons while halving the burden on businesses if the programme is not functioning well.
- Similarly, we endorse the Property Council and InfrastructureNZ's recommendations to extend the notice period for street pilots and installation of Traffic Controlling Devices from two weeks to eight weeks. The period of two weeks' notice, for example, will often take place after businesses have placed their orders ahead of time. An eight-week period would give businesses some leeway to prepare.
- The Chamber recommends equalisation of recommendations to create a neutral playing field. Councils should be allowed to increase parking, add loading zones, and improve traffic flow through street pilots. We should place trust in these Councils to know what is best for their community.

Unless these recommendations are met, the Wellington Chamber of Commerce cannot support the proposal in its current form. We urge policymakers to reconsider the proposal to include genuine, inclusive consultation, rather than unilateral decision-making.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on this important project. We look forward to further engagement on behalf of the Wellington Business Community.

Ngā mihi nui,

The Advocacy Team

Wellington Chamber of Commerce