



WELLINGTON CIVIC TRUST

Newsletter No. 3 October 2013

This is the third update *Newsletter* in 2013 for members and supporters of the Wellington Civic Trust. For the archive of earlier Newsletters see <http://www.wellingtoncivictrust.org/newsletters>

Feel free to circulate this further or to copy (with acknowledgement) from it. For more information, or for suggestions as to what you would like the Newsletter to cover, see our website or contact secretary@wellingtoncivictrust.org

Chairman's Introduction

A modern, prosperous city of character which is the best of all possible places to live and work. That Wellington is an entirely feasible, and cost-effective, outcome of applying quality urban design and human scale to the built environment of our harbour capital. It's not just buzzwords – it is achievable if the vision and the drive are there. The Wellington Civic Trust has been doing its bit to work towards this for over thirty years now – three decades in which the “look and feel” of the city has changed enormously, and to the better. The key factors are all about urban design, and about what is truly sustainable. With the campaigning for this month's Council elections (City and Regional) now over, we look forward to continuing to play our constructive part in helping inform better policies and projects for Wellington.

Thank you, Civic Trust members, for enabling the Wellington Civic Trust to do this work. This is – probably more often than it should be – often about joining the dots between various

technical projects (e.g. the Basin Bridge, the Kaiwharawhara reclamation and the Public Transport Spine Study) advanced by different agencies (NZTA, Councils, developers) all impacting on each other in ways which can compromise the overall “look and feel” of quality urban design in our city.

In this Newsletter we briefly update the June 2013 notes and give some useful links for further details.

Alan Smith

GET INVOLVED!

The Wellington Civic Trust always welcomes both new and returning members so if you are interested in contributing, or know somebody else who might be, then go to the Wellington Civic Trust website to find out how to get involved: The Trust's funds are always small so cheques to our P.O.Box 10183 Wellington, 6143 are always welcome.

THE HARCOURTS BUILDING (T&G)



Even with the odd new feature the foyer of the T&G building reflects the heritage qualities of the building

The Environment Court hearings on the owners appeal against the Commissioners decision to decline consent for demolition were held in early August. The Court’s decision:

<http://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/environment-court/lambton-quay-properties-nominee-limited-v-wellington-city-council-decision>

in early October to uphold the Commissioners’ decision is worth close study. We were a s.274 party to hearings, on both the building’s own merits and because of its significance as a “test case” with national implications in the post-Christchurch earthquakes context.

We are working with counterpart Civic Trusts in Auckland and in Christchurch to identify implications of this decision, and of the reported government decision to “do something” about this area of law, for our policies and work.

The Harcourts Building and the old Public Trust building (which is now also presenting its owners with strengthening cost problems) are two anchor heritage structures of Lambton Quay. They form part of the public character of

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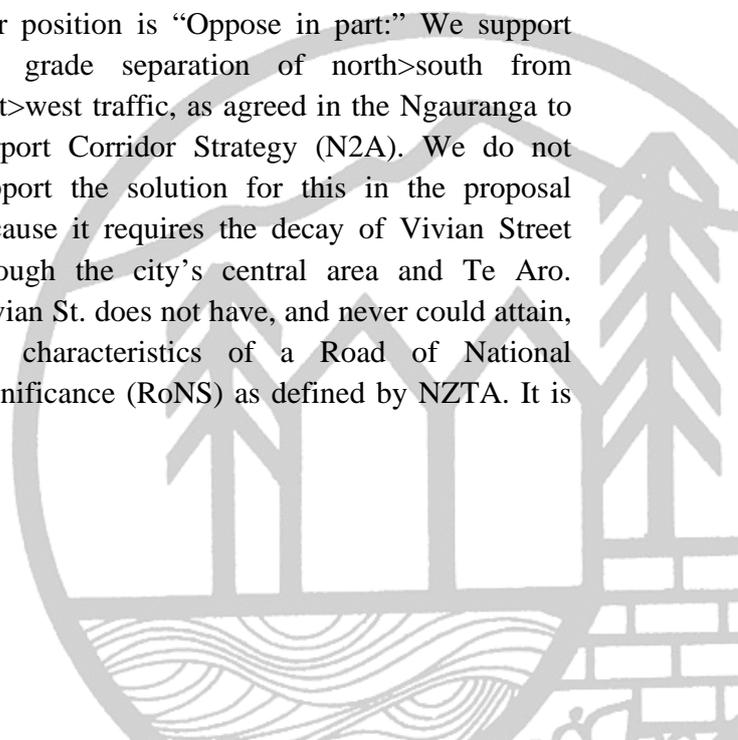
Wellington. This is recognized by the law which the Environment Court, and the City Council’s Commissioners, were upholding in their decisions against demolition of the Grade 1 listed building. There is a public benefit in the heritage listing system, and that means a public responsibility – Parliament would have known this when the RMA and Building Acts were passed. The Civic Trust has its 1981 origins in public concerns about demolitions along Lambton Quay, and is proud to have supported the Historic Places Trust – an arm of the Crown - in this latest case. For the last 20 years the listing and the structural state of the Harcourts Building have been known to its owners and have formed part of its value and potential. We are all involved if we want a modern, attractive, quality Wellington.

THE BASIN BRIDGE

Our submission to the Environmental Protection Agency’s Board of Inquiry is on our website and can be seen alongside all the other submissions at:

http://www.epa.govt.nz/Resource-management/Basin_Bridge/Submissions_received/Pages/default.aspx

Our position is “Oppose in part.” We support the grade separation of north>south from east>west traffic, as agreed in the Ngauranga to Airport Corridor Strategy (N2A). We do not support the solution for this in the proposal because it requires the decay of Vivian Street through the city’s central area and Te Aro. Vivian St. does not have, and never could attain, the characteristics of a Road of National Significance (RoNS) as defined by NZTA. It is



clear that a bridge will be built because of the political belief that “something must be done about traffic congestion at the Basin” and that it “will improve access to the airport”. In fact, the proposal, confined as it is to one small section of the transport network, does not of itself improve access to the airport, and will achieve little measurable gain for access to the north from the airport. The Civic Trust is a positive body, and it would have been good to have been able to support a proposal fully consistent with the intent of N2A. A blunt support / oppose / neutral stance is required to be declared in the EPA process; so, given the scale of the proposal’s defects, there is more to “oppose” than to “support”.

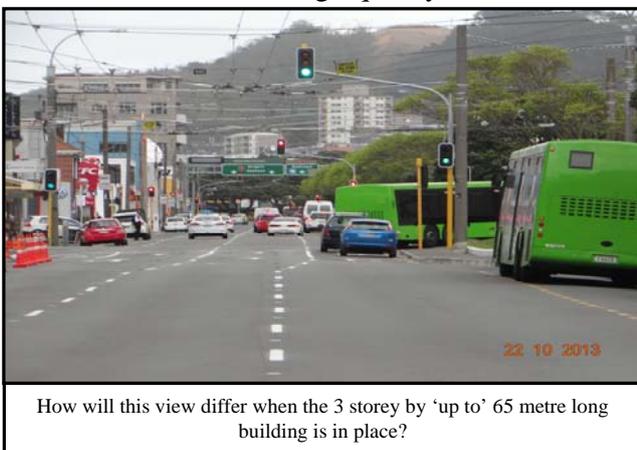
The proposal makes permanent the use of Vivian St as a RoNS. As a relatively narrow, nineteenth-century inner-city street, Vivian St. is not suited to this role on a permanent basis. It’s continued use as SH 1 stunts the growth of Te Aro contrary to the general lines envisaged in *Smart Capital 2040*. It invites future applications to demolish heritage and character buildings in the Cuba St precinct in order to achieve widening beyond 3 lanes to accommodate reasonably predictable traffic growth. The RoNS will bring the usual induced traffic growth, and no doubt by the time of the hearings in January 2014 NZTA will have found even more numbers to prove that the proposal for a one-way bridge remains “the only sensible option” for SH 1 in the Basin Reserve – Te Aro area. The proposal before the Board of Inquiry requires all south / east bound SH 1 traffic growth to funnel down Vivian St. through the central area of downtown Wellington, followed by a right-angle turn into Kent Terrace before being confronted with the bottle-neck of

the 2-way Mt. Victoria tunnel.

Over many years a wide corridor has been designated between the Terrace and Mt Victoria tunnels to accommodate SH 1 and to enable its separation from ordinary inner-city streets of the Vivian St. type. The proposal makes no reference to the option of using this corridor to meet its RoNS objectives; in fact NZTA states that “an application to alter (and thereby reduce) the designation area to that needed to operate and maintain SH 1 is currently being prepared”. It states that the Vivian St. clearways in the proposal “will provide sufficient capacity to meet the future requirements of SH 1 (to 2031) in this location.....we have recently commenced the Terrace Tunnel Investigation project. We expect the conclusion of this study will be helpful on the future long-term needs of Vivian St.the study is expected to conclude in early 2015”. This means that NZTA’s study on the long-term needs of Vivian St will be finished after the one-way bridge has begun and after the designation of Karo Drive for SH 1 is reduced. This seems back-to-front to us. If the proposal is consented, Wellington is faced with the prospect of a repeat performance when it is realized that Vivian St and Kent Tce are not appropriate for use as a RoNS and that another arrangement is in fact needed at the Basin Reserve. If this situation is envisaged at all, then it should be part of the present consents process. The Board of Inquiry can test and probe whether Vivian St meets those RoNS objectives better (efficiency, cost, effectiveness, national benefit, quality, safety, etc) than the shorter route around the edge of the central area along a corridor already set aside over many years for SH 1 purposes and in fact already half-used for that purpose.

The incompleteness of details in the proposal shows an undue haste to secure consent before the risk of unsatisfactory loose ends is properly managed. The detailed design features of the bridge and of the Northern Gateway building are vital for confidence in the urban quality of the capital city – yet the public is unable, from the generalized information given in the proposal, to appraise either. The risk is that design details will be set from a highway operational viewpoint; the prominent location and public interest merit a higher standard and outcome than this.

The proposal for a new “Northern Gateway” building up to 65m long and 3 storeys high requires more information than “while the final details of such a building and its finished aspects are yet to be confirmed”. This seems to be the “free grandstand” that was widely publicized in 2010 as being agreed between NZTA and the Basin Reserve Trust. There has been ample time in the intervening years to have concluded the “final details”, including in particular what it will look like from the non-cricket side, i.e. as seen by people coming down Kent Tce from the north. There is a risk of it being consented as a match to the New World supermarket at the other end of the two Terraces - just a bland blank wall of low design quality.



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The design approach for the bridge itself is of an “elegant” bridge rather than an “iconic” one. There is a real risk of an “elegant” bridge quickly becoming festooned with underhanging signs, overhead signal gantries, banners draped over the wire-netting handrails and the normal grime and staining which a concrete bridge incurs. It is highly visible, and consent should require much more than just its effectiveness as a traffic conveyor.

Pedestrian and cycle facilities vary from the NZTA’s own standards.

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/pedestrian-planning-guide/docs/pedestrian-planning-guide.pdf>

says that the desirable width for an unsegregated (i.e. no separation between pedestrians & cyclists) shared path is 3m and that "it is important to...leave a lateral clearance of one metre on both sides of the path to allow for recovery by cyclists after a loss of control or swerving" so the total width should be 5m. This has been brushed aside in the Basin Bridge proposal seeking consent, to meet vehicle needs.

TOWN BELT

Our submissions emphasised the enduring (since 1839) original value of this area as open recreation space. Leased land should be strictly minimized, and the position of Town Belt Curator established to ensure that it is not seen managerially as “just another park”. The City Council’s final decisions are at:

<http://wellington.govt.nz/your-council/plans-policies-and-bylaws/plans-policies/a-z-index/wellington-town-belt-management-plan>

WATERFRONT

The next steps on the development of Kumutoto sites 8, 9 and 10 were deferred until after this month’s Council elections. Our view remains that, so long as developments accord with the 2001 Waterfront framework, this northern area linking to the working port, to Harbour Quays and to the Railway Station can be a real asset to the city and to the overall waterfront.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This has always been important to the Civic Trust because effective PT systems reduce the demand for road space and increase the people density and vitality of the city. The findings coming out of the PT Spine Study seem to confirm that its real purpose was to undermine any case for imaginative use of rail-based extensions to the present systems.



The trolley buses sweep silently through the city – clean, green and one of Wellington’s points of difference.

The parallel Wellington City Bus review seems from what has been released so far to reduce the role of electric traction (trolleybus) and involve actual reductions to many present services. A persistent failing is the absence of much comment about the quality of bus stops, i.e. where people have to go to and wait in normal

Wellington weather conditions for their public transport services.

COMING UP

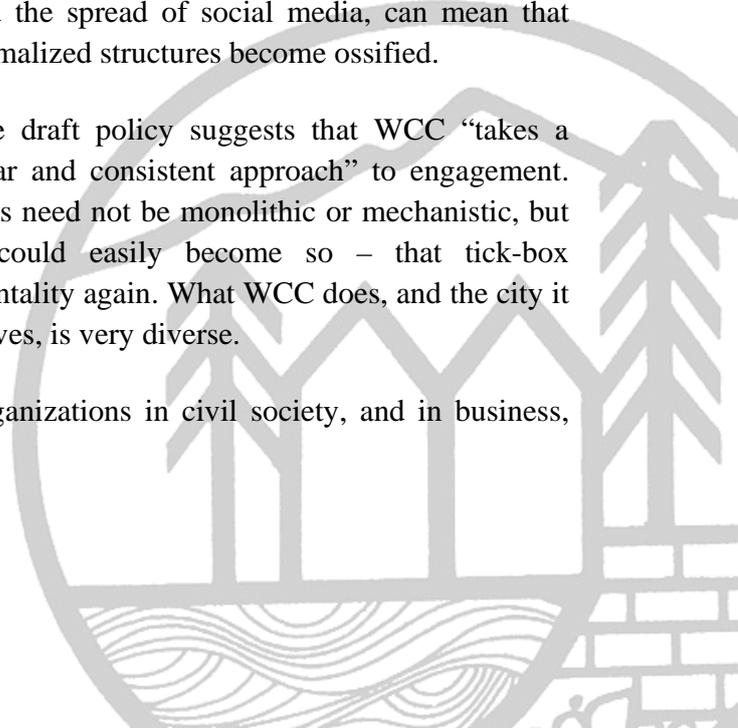
A theme is evolving for a Civic Trust seminar in early (March/April) 2014 on inner-city north-south corridors. This will link together the RoNS-related improvements to Kent and Cambridge Terraces, the Capital City processional routes between Parliament and the National War Memorial, and the urban design scenarios for the Te Aro area. Trustees Craig Palmer and Bruce Stokell will welcome comments on this from interested members.

On the national level, we need to keep a continuing close watch on changes to the RMA and Historic Places legislation. Engagement with the newly-elected councils is essential and in this respect we made these comments to the recent City Council review of its Engagement Policy:

If formal policy can encourage engagement, good. But if it just leads to the “tick-box” mentality which modern management systems seem to favour, then there is a real risk of it all becoming too structured to be really effective. Changing demographics (e.g. more immigrants) and the spread of social media, can mean that formalized structures become ossified.

The draft policy suggests that WCC “takes a clear and consistent approach” to engagement. This need not be monolithic or mechanistic, but it could easily become so – that tick-box mentality again. What WCC does, and the city it serves, is very diverse.

Organizations in civil society, and in business,



Organizations in civil society, and in business, come and go, and wax and wane. Beware becoming reliant on the good and the great. Focus groups and social media can sometimes provide more useful perspectives. “Squeaky wheels” are part of democratic society – sometimes lubrication will solve them, and sometimes they are just always squeaking. But more constructively, often apparent squeaky wheels signal an actual problem or something worth listening to. Beware that a formalised engagement policy doesn’t filter this sort of “annoying” stuff out.

The Civic Trust values the relationship it now has with WCC, as no doubt do many other entities – none of us would want a haze of ‘paralysis by analysis’ to get in the way of good decision-making based on sound evidence and a real understanding of the big Wellington picture. That real understanding and sound evidence will be strengthened by early and genuine engagement across the community.

SHAPE THE FUTURE

This just in, the Local Government Commission

has just announced a series of public meetings on the Changes for Local Government in the Wellington Region. For details of a public meeting near you:

<http://us4.campaign-archive2.com/?u=7d4b073a54ab940ef7da143af&id=3723593724>

150 YEAR CELEBRATIONS



On 1 December 1863 the first locomotive-hauled passenger train operated between Ferrymead and Christchurch. As part of the 150 year celebrations Wellingtonians were able to explore steam and diesel locomotives and carriages at the Wellington Railway station.

WELLINGTON CIVIC TRUST – BOARD TRUSTEES 2013/14

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- Treasurer: David Tai (and Membership Secretary)
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- Other Trustees Bill Robertson, Craig Palmer, Liz Mellish, Mike Mellor, Bruce Stokell, Jonathan Suggate, Gerald Blunt, Duncan Joiner, Murray Thessman, Jim McMahon, and Maurice Clark.

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