



**KARORI  
RESIDENTS  
ASSOCIATION**  
He waka eke noa

# Let's Get Wellington Moving: Time To Re-focus

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*Author Bill Guest 2 March 2021*

## Introduction

In 2001 the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) began considering how to connect the Wellington foothills motorway to the planned second tunnel through Mount Victoria. The new tunnel was to be located slightly north of the present tunnel, and parallel to it.

14 years later, after years of bickering and court cases, the proposed bridged highway on the north side of the Basin Reserve was defeated by the decision of the High Court not to overturn the decision of Commissioners to decline the resource consent required to proceed. While the Mayor of Wellington at the time, and several Councillors expressed pleasure at the decision, the only positive solutions suggested seemed to be “mass transit/light rail” and “cycleways” without a clear strategy or justification for either.

In 2016 NZTA reached an agreement with Wellington City Council (WCC) and Greater Wellington City Council (GWRC) to form a joint planning group to devise and implement solutions to the growing congestion problems in Wellington City. The group became known as Let's Get Wellington Moving (LGWM).

Karori Residents Association is concerned about LGWM and believes that it is urgent that WCC asserts its position as the planning authority for the city and seeks a significant re-focus of the work of LGWM.

## Background

When the Wellington foot-hills motorway was built in the late 1960s, the intention was to swing eastwards after passing through the new Terrace tunnel, and to cross over Aro Flat to meet the both the old (1931) and a new Mt Victoria tunnel. The new tunnel was to be built slightly to the north of the existing tunnel. The land had been surveyed, and the city had already driven a two-metre heading shaft right through the hill to assess the geology and water inflows that might be encountered.

In the early 1970s, the NZ economy struggled following the “oil price shocks” when the oil producers of the Middle East banded together to break the hegemony of the western nations’ oil companies. Crude oil prices soared, impacting all economies that had a heavy reliance on oil for industry, electricity production, and transport fuels. As part of economic measures taken to cope with the much higher oil prices, most government projects were re-appraised, and many were shelved. The completion of the motorway connection to Mt Victoria tunnel, and the second tunnel, were among projects that were stopped.

A second project that did not proceed was a second tunnel to augment Karori tunnel and thus improve road access to the western suburbs. First advocated in the early 1950s by the City Engineer, this project was endorsed by consultants De Leuw Cather (DLC) in the early 1960s.

**KRA** has researched newspaper reports of the period and reviewed the DLC report. It seems evident that the City Engineer was following two important principles:

1. Main arterial and highway routes should bypass the CBD as much as possible; and
2. Traffic that needed to enter and leave the CBD should be dispersed through several access points as far as practicable.

(The City Engineer had taken a similar approach when considering a second western suburbs access tunnel. Recognising that the current Karori tunnel distributed traffic between Glenmore



Street and Kelburn Road, he proposed that a second tunnel should head towards Aro Street or Abel Smith Street.)

**KRA** believes that the concepts being followed by the City Engineer were basically correct. However, nearly 70 years later, the solutions proposed then now require review.

## The Present Position

In the 1960s, the southern edge of Aro Flat was probably not considered to be part of the CBD<sup>1</sup>. The proposed route to the Mt Victoria tunnels was well clear of Manners St and Courtenay Place and their immediate side streets. The same cannot be said today. The use of Vivian St as a major west-to-east arterial route does not fit well with the activities of the CBD.

Karo Drive, the relatively new east-to-west arterial road, can be considered to be close to the southern fringe of the CBD, but **KRA** believes that Karo Drive also obstructs potential growth in the area it passes through.

Karo Drive is not yet complete. It is still linked to the impossible snarl of traffic around the Basin Reserve. The overpass proposal was defeated by the procedures of the Resource Management Act and the lack of clear and direct Council input.

The use of the Basin Reserve is around two 5-day Test Matches per year, plus maybe five 1-day fixtures, a total of 15 days.

It seems to **KRA** that a better solution would have been to create a New Basin Reserve venue elsewhere and to have freed up the current land for a well-designed traffic interchange. This would have “fitted” well with the proposal for the second Mt Victoria tunnel, and could have improved access to Newtown and the southern suburbs. Too late; we are where we are. Fresh thinking is needed.

Following the decision to disapprove the overpass proposal, a “partnership” was formed by Greater Wellington City Council, New Zealand Transport Agency, and Wellington City Council. They established a new planning body which is called “Let’s Get Wellington Moving” (LGWM).

The opening page of LGWM’s website proclaims:

### What’s our vision for Wellington?

- A great harbour city, accessible to all
- With attractive places
- Shared streets
- And efficient local and regional journeys

To realise our vision we need to move more people with fewer vehicles.

### How did we get to our vision?

We started with the kind of city and region our community wants, and defined the transport system needed to enable that.

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<sup>1</sup> KRA believes that the Central Business District is now a misnomer. On page 7 the argument for replacing it with Inner-City Wellington (ICW) is set out.

## Programme Objectives

### A transport system that:

Enhances the liveability of the central city



**LIVEABILITY**

Provides more efficient and reliable access for users



**ACCESS**

Reduces reliance on private vehicle travel



**REDUCED CAR RELIANCE**

Improves safety for all users



**SAFETY**

Is adaptable to disruptions and future uncertainty



**RESILIENCE**

## The community's urban design and transport principles

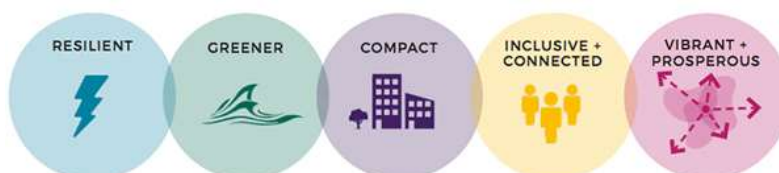
We talked to people across the region and asked them to tell us what they love about Wellington City and what frustrates them about getting around it. Around 10,000 people responded.

We used their feedback to develop 12 guiding principles we've used to plan and assess our programme.













## Our priorities for the region's success

The Let's Get Wellington Moving partners have shared priorities for the region's future.



**KRA** believes these "aspirational" goals are mostly unmeasurable and incapable of being assessed by cost-benefit analyses. The "guiding principles" are particularly unsuitable for project definition and design work. **KRA** believes that it is possible to define guidelines that are clearer and more precise.

From the above vision and guidelines, LGWM then lists its projects:

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  <p><b>Golden Mile Improvements</b></p> <p>The Golden Mile (Lambton Quay to Courtenay Place) is the heart of Wellington. We want to make it...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>         |  <p><b>Central city safer speeds</b></p> <p>The speed limits on most central city streets are now 30km/h.</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>  |  <p><b>State Highway Safer Speeds</b></p> <p>Reviewing speeds on State Highway 1 east of Mt Victoria.</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>   |  <p><b>Cobham Drive Crossing</b></p> <p>Investigating options for a walking and cycling crossing over Cobham Drive.</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>   |
|  <p><b>Thorndon Quay &amp; Hutt Road</b></p> <p>We need to make a start now on moving more people with fewer vehicles. Thorndon Quay and Hutt Road...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p> |  <p><b>Mass Rapid Transit</b></p> <p>Creating a new mass transit route connecting the Railway Station with Newtown and the eastern...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>           |  <p><b>Central city walking Improvements</b></p> <p>Small changes at intersections will help to make walking in the central city safer, quicker and...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p> |  <p><b>Bus, bike and walking connections</b></p> <p>With a growing population, we need to make a start on moving more people with fewer vehicles – that...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p> |
|  <p><b>Smarter Transport Network</b></p> <p>Investigating a smart transport package that makes best use of infrastructure while we build it...</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p>       |  <p><b>The Basin Reserve and an extra Mt Victoria Tunnel</b></p> <p>Investigating options to improve access on foot, by bike and in a vehicle.</p> <p><a href="#">Read more</a></p> |  |   |



**KRA** makes these points about the projects:

1. None of the projects directly improve traffic or public transport problems in the Northern, Western, or Southern suburbs of the city.
2. Lowering central city speeds and “reviewing” State Highway 1 speeds east of the Mount Victoria tunnel are very minor issues that hardly deserve the label of projects.
3. Mass Rapid Transit connecting the Railway Station with Newtown and the Eastern suburbs is limited in scope, and while it might benefit commuters who arrive in Wellington by rail, it does nothing for the Western or Southern suburbs residents, nor does it help Northern suburbs commuters who cannot easily use the single line Johnsonville Line (which does not qualify for the term “mass rapid transit”).
4. None of the projects specifically recognise the traffic and parking problems associated with Wellington Hospital, the major hospital for the entire region. KRA contends that Wellington Hospital needs much better access to and from SH1 and SH2 than it has now.

## **Where Do We Go from Here?**

**KRA** believes:

### **Organisation**

1. Wellington City Council is the planning and roading authority for the city. By entering a “partnership” with GWRC and NZTA, Council has weakened its grip on issues that are vital to the residents and businesses of Wellington.
2. Council should limit its involvement in LGWM to providing advice, guidance, and directions on its requirements for transport works and public transport services within the city.
3. NZTA should accept responsibility for improving the SH1/SH2 links to Wellington Airport and Wellington Hospital, in accordance with the requirements of the Spatial Plan and District Scheme of Wellington City Council.
4. GWRC should arrange public transport services that meet the needs of Wellington City (as part of its responsibility regionally) as defined in conjunction with Wellington City Council.
5. **KRA** believes that Wellington City Council needs to boost its urban planning and transport planning capability to ensure that the city’s needs are met.

## Design Principles

1. The design of transport projects and services requires a thorough understanding of the users:
  - a. The purpose of travel
  - b. The origin and destination of travel
  - c. The nature and capability of vehicle
  - d. The need to park, including place and length of time.
2. Commuters (persons making a journey to and from a single place of employment) are the most important group to persuade to switch to public transport to achieve “more people in fewer vehicles”.
3. Most commercial activities cannot switch to public transport.
4. Customers/clients of retailers and services are vital to the maintenance of commercial activities, and only a proportion of this group can use public transport.
5. The concept of the CBD is outmoded. Council is projecting a significant rise in the population of the inner city over the next 30 years. The area traditionally known as the Central Business District will also have a large apartment-dwelling population, a trend that is already well-advanced. In 1972, when the Terrace Tunnel was opened, Vivian Street was south of what was then the CBD, but this is no longer true. A better term is either Inner City Precinct, or Inner-City Wellington (ICW)<sup>2</sup>. The boundaries of ICW are still under study, but the preliminary concept is for them to run from The Terrace to the waterfront between the Railway Station and Kent Terrace, closing on the south side through Abel Smith Street, Willis Street, Webb Street, Taranaki Street, Karo Drive and Buckle Street.
6. Dispersal of critical transport activities can reduce congestion and should be considered in design:
  - a. Commuter carparking outside of ICW may encourage the use of public transport into and around ICW
  - b. Arterial and major roads should bypass ICW as much as possible.
  - c. Public transport within ICW needs a thorough review. If many apartment blocks are built without off-street parks for occupiers’ cars (note the recent government policy statement on urban development) then easy public transport circulating within ICW seems essential. Public transport should be routed close to but clear of densely congested areas of commercial activity.
  - d. Traffic queues (congestion) should be controlled to occur on major roads and off-ramps rather than within the CBD.

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<sup>2</sup> From this point on, the term CBD is dropped, and ICW used instead.



7. Wellington Hospital and the medical precinct nearby require special consideration in respect of transport and parking.
8. Parking is a critical facility for the support of commercial activities.
9. Very regular public transport should be amply provided within ICW and commuter car parking areas.
10. The use of public transport should be encouraged rather than forced, by making it regular, reliable, and convenient. Fares should be affordable, especially for commuters who are otherwise tempted to continue using their cars.
11. Public transport must have either exclusive routes or well-designed and enforced priority lanes on existing routes.
12. Public transport routes that have a loop design are desirable for covering a greater area of residential areas, and for resilience (when roads are blocked for any reason).

## Cycling

**KRA** believes that the role of cycling in satisfying transport demands in Wellington needs further study. In particular:

- What are the main purposes of cyclists? Are they commuters, leisure-seekers, clients/customers, or engaged in commercial services?
- Do cyclists take up less road space than motorists, both while moving, and while stationary in queues?
- Do cyclists who are commuting take up less road space than commuters who are travelling in buses (when calculated on the basis of road lane length per commuter)?
- What is the sensitivity of traffic congestion to an increasing proportion of cyclists on major roads?
- Are cycleways proving to be a cost-effective solution to traffic congestion in Wellington?

**KRA** notes that Council has produced no plan for urban cycleways in Karori (or anywhere in the Western Ward), and that Karori Tunnel is hazardous for cyclists.

<https://wellington.govt.nz/services/parking-and-roads/bus-priority/overview>

## A Route for SH1/SH2 to the Airport

**KRA** believes it is essential that SH1/SH2 traffic heading to and from Wellington International Airport and Wellington Hospital must bypass ICW and all adjacent areas that are likely to be considered as ICW over the next 30 years. (Principle 6b on page 7 above).

Wellington City Council has recently released a draft Spatial Plan that envisages a growth in population in ICW of around 18,000 people. **KRA** believes that SH1/SH2 must be re-routed

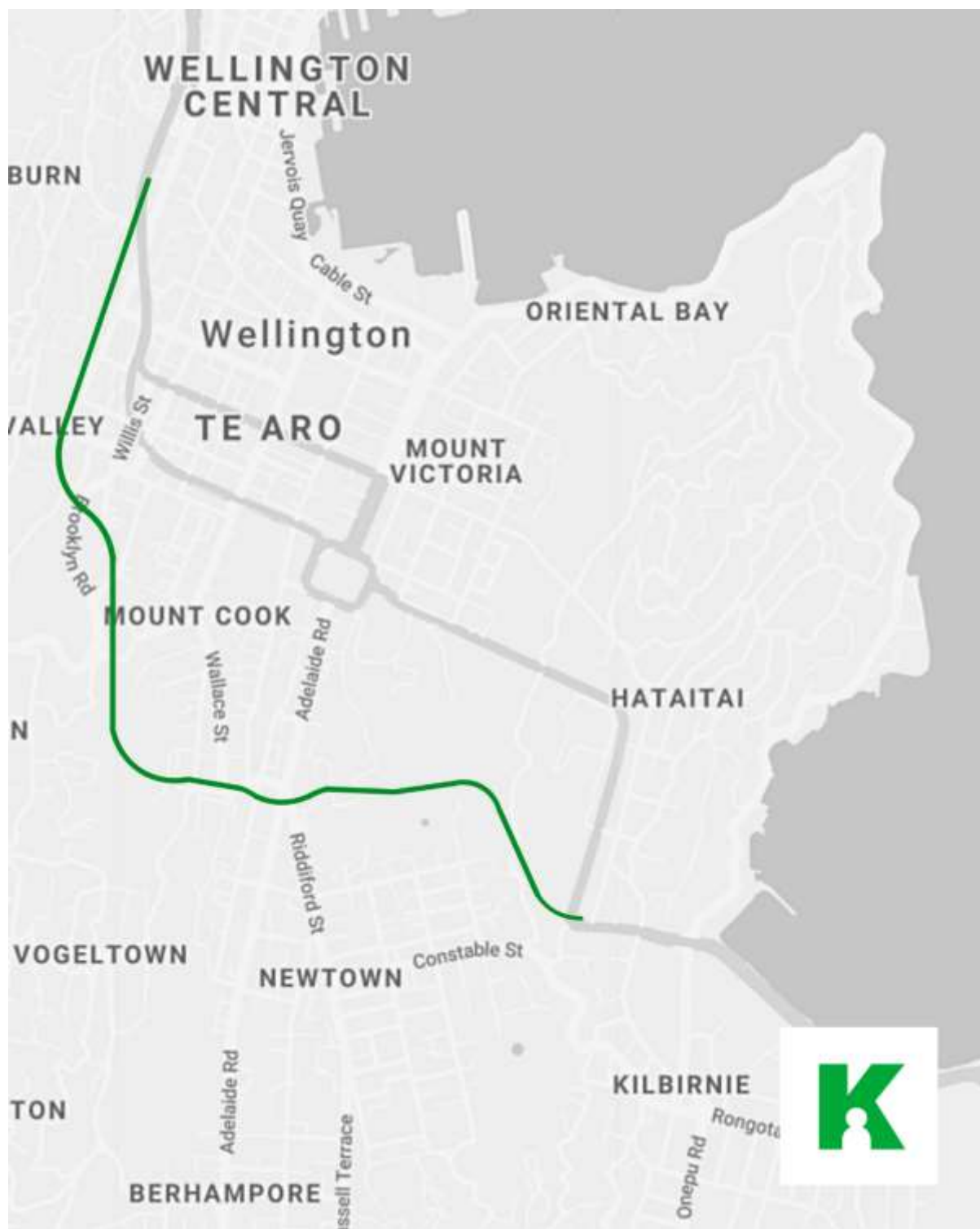




out of Vivian Street, Kent and Cambridge Terraces, and the existing Mt Victoria tunnel. Diagrams currently published on the LGWM web site do not do this.

**KRA** notes that Karo Drive, only a few years old, already appears to be at or near capacity for much of the day.

**KRA** believes that a totally new proposal is required and suggests a route as shown in green on the map below.



This is a long extension to the foothills motorway that was not completed in the 1970s. **KRA** envisages these elements:

1. A second Terrace tunnel, longer than the current tunnel, extending to a point above Aro Street. The southern portal could be close to or just below Abel Smith Street. This tunnel would carry SH1/SH2 traffic travelling to Newtown and the airport.
2. An overpass across Aro Street and lower Brooklyn Road.
3. A mixture of tunnel and road (to be determined) that protects the Town Belt and reaches a point near the southern end of Wallace Street.
4. An overpass over Adelaide Road.
5. The second Mt Victoria tunnel, commencing somewhere between Government House and Wellington Hospital. This tunnel would be curved to have the eastern portal near the corner of Ruahine Street and Cobham Drive.
6. A limited number of on and off ramps to enable connections to the hospital precinct, Newtown, and southern suburbs.
7. On and off ramps near Bowen Street to allow improved access between western suburbs and the airport.
8. On and off ramps that allow improved access to SH1/SH2 and the southern suburbs without requiring passage through ICW.

### **Public Transport and Parking**

1. **KRA** supports the principle that as many commuter journeys to and from ICW as possible should be by public transport.
2. However, **KRA** recognises that it is not feasible for all commuters to use public transport directly from their homes, and probably never will be.
3. **KRA** believes that car parks for commuters, and customers/clients of commercial, professional, and government services in ICW must be considered as part of any solution to the problems of traffic and parking congestion in Wellington. **KRA** envisages a network of such car parks in the suburbs, and near the outer fringes of ICW.
4. The network of car parks should be well-served by public transport. **KRA** envisages loop routes within ICW, perhaps (and preferably) with zero fares.
5. **KRA** has already advocated for commuter car parks (with “kiss and ride” lanes) in Karori at Appleton Park, near the Town Centre, and near Karori Park.
6. Bicycle stands and lockers should be incorporated with commuter car parks.
7. **KRA** believes that public transport serving Karori will be provided by buses for the foreseeable future. Rail transport, even if feasible, would be expensive and hard to justify.

8. Public transport must have either exclusive routes (preferable) or priority lanes on existing roads. If public transport transit times are significantly slower than the times for private cars, then commuters will remain incentivised to take their cars.

### **What is the Cost?**

**KRA** does not know what this proposal would cost. Many feasibility studies and design work are necessary before any estimate can be prepared. **KRA** is confident that the benefits would be much greater than the current concept of a mass transit system (perhaps “light rail”) between the Railway Station and the airport. The benefits would be greater because they would involve all suburbs and ICW and would be shared with businesses right across the city and the region. The short mass transit scheme now vaguely proposed provides little for the northern, western, and southern suburbs, and little for businesses.

### **Conclusions**

This paper has set out a proposal for a major road project that enables the bypassing of the ICW for traffic from SH1/SH2 that does not need to enter ICW. The design principles and goals are clear, and both public transport and commercial traffic needs are considered. The proposal also includes suggestions for improving traffic flows between all suburbs and ICW and SH1/SH2.

**KRA** is working on a separate proposal to improve transport access to the western suburbs. It complements the proposal presented in this paper. Taken together (and perhaps enhanced by ideas from other suburbs) they represent a Real Initiative to Get Wellington Moving.

**KRA** believes that a reorganisation of the Let’s Get Wellington Moving structure is essential. The key issue is that Wellington City Council should assert its statutory role as planning and roading authority of the city and ensure that a sound and realistic transport infrastructure is provided for all suburbs and ICW. **KRA** cannot see how the current projects championed on the LGWM web site can achieve this objective.

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