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Golden Mile Speed Limit Change (KCIF02)  
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Dear Sir/Madam

## Submission on Wellington City Council's Golden Mile Speed Limit Change proposal

Attached is a copy of a submission made on behalf of Greater Wellington Regional Council.

This submission was approved by the Economic Wellbeing Committee of Greater Wellington Regional Council on 25 October 2012.

The Council wishes to be heard in support of its submission.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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# **Greater Wellington submission on Wellington City Council's Golden Mile Speed Limit Change proposal**

**25 October 2012**

## **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Golden Mile Speed Limit Change proposal. Greater Wellington supports the proposal to reduce the speed limit from 30km/h to 20km/h along the Golden Mile from Panama Street through to Taranaki Street as part of a wider package of measures to improve pedestrian safety in this important pedestrian and public precinct.

The Golden Mile is an important public transport spine through the Wellington City CBD and plays a crucial role as part of the wider public transport network. Providing reliable journey times through this part of the city is very important and measures to improve the level of service for public transport through the corridor will be an ongoing objective for the Council. However, Greater Wellington is also strongly committed to improving safety outcomes for all, including pedestrians, and recognises the need to balance safety of pedestrians and effective public transport through this corridor.

## **Policy context**

The Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS) sets out the strategic policy framework for development of the regional transport network. The RLTS promotes a multi-modal approach to achieving its broad objectives. The strategy seeks to increase the uptake, and improve the level of service, of public transport. It also seeks to increase walking trips and to improve safety for pedestrians.

The Wellington Regional Public Transport Plan (RPTP) gives effect to the public transport service components of the RLTS. The plan includes a hierarchy of public transport service layers and describes a different role and level of service associated with each. At the top of the hierarchy is the 'Rapid Transit Network' which is considered to be the backbone of the public transport network. The public transport corridor following the Golden Mile through the Wellington CBD is identified as part of this rapid transit network layer. Consequently, the public transport services through this corridor aim to provide a high level of service in relation to capacity, reliability, journey times, and frequency.

The RPTP also recognises the importance of safety in relation to the public transport network. Policy 5.3 of the RPTP is to 'Advocate for improved personal safety and public transport road safety'. In addition to addressing the safety and personal security of public transport users when on board a services and when waiting at stops/stations, this policy recognises the importance of improving safety outcomes for all users. The methods under policy 5.3 include Greater Wellington working with transport operators, local authorities and other parties to improve the safety of public transport operations and to reduce pedestrian accidents, and advocating for improved pedestrian

safety in high risk areas<sup>1</sup>. We note that Greater Wellington was represented on a joint steering group to review pedestrian safety along the Golden Mile.

### **Impact on bus travel times**

Observational information suggests that for much of the time buses along this corridor are unable to reach speeds near the current 30 km/h speed limit due to congestion, traffic lights, etc. However, during a limited survey<sup>2</sup> a small number of buses were recorded travelling in excess of the current 30km/h speed limit between stops/signals

Speed limit reductions are focused on, and generally have the largest impact on, reducing the high speeds of traffic (often the 85th percentile speeds) rather than average speeds. Analysis of actual bus speeds along the Golden Mile at present using real time information shows that average speeds of most services<sup>3</sup> are already below 20km/h<sup>4</sup>. Lowering the speed limit is therefore expected to have a positive impact on safety by reducing the speed of those individual vehicles at the top end, without having more than a marginal impact on average travel speeds and bus journey times through the corridor overall.

Theoretically, a change in the speed from 30km/h to 20km/h could result in a maximum increase in travel time of 1 minute, 12 seconds across the entire subject length of road (1.2 km), in completely free flow conditions. However, in reality there are 4 stops and 7 signalised junctions along the subject stretch of the Golden Mile and buses would probably be accelerating or decelerating for around 50% of the time that they will actually be moving. This, together with the fact that buses are operating in congested conditions for much of the day, means that the impact on overall travel time will be significantly less.

Bus journey time analysis using real time information shows that across all time periods travelling south (Manners Street to Lambton Quay), only 15% of services currently operate at an average speed greater than 20 km/h and the estimated average increase in journey time for those services is 41 seconds. Travelling north (Lambton Quay to Manners Street), only 20% of services currently operate at an average speed greater than 20 km/h and the estimated average increase in journey time for those services is 44 seconds. There would be no impact on services already operating at an average speed less than the 20 km/h speed limit in either direction<sup>5</sup>. This is not considered to represent a significant reduction in the level of service for bus passengers, particularly taking into account the relatively small proportion of services affected, and on balance it is considered to be reasonable given the pedestrian safety concerns in this corridor.

Greater Wellington notes that measures to continue enhancing bus journey time reliability through the Golden Mile, in addition to improvements coming out of the Wellington City Bus Review, may require the relevant agencies to look further at traffic signal phasing, bus priority measures, and optimising bus stop locations.

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<sup>1</sup> Greater Wellington Regional Council, *Wellington Public Transport Plan 2011-2021*, page 20.

<sup>2</sup> Greater Wellington Regional Council, Sustainable Transport Team, File Note: Golden Mile Bus Speed - Manual Radar Test - October 2012

<sup>3</sup> 80% or more during the AM peak, PM peak, and Inter-peak

<sup>4</sup> Greater Wellington Regional Council, Public Transport Group, Bus Journey Time Analysis based on data from Real Time Information. Note: The calculation of average speed excludes dwell time spent at bus stops, but includes any time spent stopped between bus stops at traffic signals or for any other reason.

<sup>5</sup> Greater Wellington Regional Council, Public Transport Group, Bus Journey Time Analysis based on data from Real Time Information

It is important to acknowledge that, longer term, the issue of appropriate speed limits will need to be re-considered in light of future vehicle types, technologies, infrastructure changes and route alignment for the public transport spine through the Wellington CBD. A feasibility study looking at options for a future high quality public transport spine is currently underway with a report on the options due out next year, while implementation of a preferred option is likely to be some time away.

### **Impact on pedestrian crashes and severity**

Along the Golden Mile between Panama Street and Taranaki Street the road corridor is relatively narrow with limited ability to provide a buffer between pedestrians and vehicles. It is also an area with high pedestrian, vehicle and bus movements, and therefore a higher likelihood of conflict between these different road users. Vehicular speed, particularly speed at impact, is widely recognised as one of the most important predictors of pedestrian injury severity or fatality<sup>6</sup>. Hence a lower speed limit to reflect the characteristics of this particular environment is considered appropriate.

A number of overseas studies have shown that the relative risk of severe injury or fatality to a pedestrian in collisions involving buses is significantly higher than a collision between a pedestrian and all other vehicle types. The proposed reduction in speed from 30km/h to 20km/h has the potential to reduce the stopping distance of buses by half<sup>7</sup>. Lowering the speed limit as a means to reduce the risk of severe injury and fatality as a result of collisions between pedestrians and buses is therefore strongly supported.

### **Conclusion**

While the trade-offs between pedestrian safety and bus travel speeds associated with this proposal are recognised, pedestrian safety is very important and on balance the potential safety benefits are considered to off-set any marginal impact on bus journey times. This proposal is therefore supported as part of a wider package of complementary measures to improve pedestrian safety through this corridor by addressing pedestrian behaviour, the road environment and vehicles.

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<sup>6</sup> University of Washington and US Department of Transportation (February 2007) Research Report: Managing Pedestrian Safety I: Injury Severity

<sup>7</sup> Estimate based on application of the Heavy Vehicle Brake Code formula from page 6 of Land Transport Rule: Heavy-vehicle Brakes, 2006.