



Submission

by the

Victoria University of Wellington

Students' Association

on the

WCC Long-Term Plan 2021

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VUWSA also wishes to make an oral submission.

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1. Introduction

Students want to live in a city that is sustainable, creative, and safe. Students want organised and comprehensive public transport, healthy and affordable housing, and a city which brims with job opportunities and culture. An increasing number of students want to see decisions made with and by mana whenua and Māori. The formation, development, and implementation of the Wellington City Council (WCC) Long Term Plan can bring into effect each of these important kaupapa. It is a crucial document, which can help to solve some of Wellington City's most acute issues, from leaking pipes to lacklustre public participation.

Below are the views of Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association, on behalf of the students of Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington. We have focused on areas we believe are particularly central to the student experience. In addition, our focus has also expanded to the wider Wellington region, and the groups most impacted by public development and infrastructure. As active members of the Wellington Central City, students are particularly interested in ensuring that those groups most acutely impacted by Wellington's infrastructural systems are highlighted as key stakeholders. This includes our disabled community, tāngata whenua, migrants, renters and, of course, students.

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association represents all 22,000 students studying at Te Herenga Waka-Victoria University of Wellington. We believe in direct and empowering democracy, and are particularly interested in areas of Wellington City Council's infrastructure such as public transport, water supply, and housing. These areas of key concern recur throughout our submission below, and we hope to continue to work with WCC, and other local bodies, to make genuine change on these ongoing issues.

2. Water Ways

VUWSA believe that the Wellington City Council should undertake option three – accelerated investment. The three waters system operated by Wellington City Council relates to all four of the community outcomes outlined at the beginning of the consultation document - environmental, social, economic, and cultural. Our current system impacts our environment through its pollution of local waterways, directly affecting Wellington's awa and whenua. It's poor structure and leaks are costing ratepayers thousands of dollars, impacting on our city's economic viability. Water is also of deep

significance to our mana whenua and taura Māori, and the clarity of our streams and adequacy of our pipes also contributes to the overall hauora of Wellington's residents.

VUWSA acknowledges the Council's view that there is not enough information currently gathered to understand the full scope of investment needed to accelerate the improvement of Wellington's water ways. While we understand that there is not a clear way forward, VUWSA believes that a robust and modern three waters network is an important requirement for Wellington's environmental and economic sustainability, and should be further prioritised through accelerated investment. By choosing option three, Wellington City Council is committing itself to find robust and creative ways to address issues with our three waters system. It also allows for a more than sufficient section of the overall budget to be put aside to address this issue.

An expanded and more efficient water infrastructure in Wellington presents the opportunity for further development of houses. Students desperately need low-cost housing, and any changes to the current infrastructural standing of Wellington's water ways should be focused on providing further infrastructure to support the development of high-density housing within the central city. It is the responsibility of WCC, alongside central government, to begin addressing this issue immediately, or risk losing the lifeblood of their city – students.

VUWSA supports the Council's focus on reducing future maintenance costs, and believe that accelerating the process of understanding the water ways pipes carbon footprint would help Wellington to meet its obligations under Te Atakura. Another necessary change to our water system in order for Wellington to fall in line with its Te Atakura framework is the improvement of our wastewater system. Our current wastewater system pollutes every stream within Wellington. Not only is this unacceptable for Wellington, as the capital and leading city of New Zealand, this ongoing pollution is disrespectful to our local iwi and hapu, and those who rely on our rivers as a source of cultural connection and livelihood.

VUWSA also supports the continued usage of green space to soak up stormwater. An increase in greenspace is to the general benefit of our city's natural environment, and VUWSA believe that these green areas should also prioritize native flora, to the benefit of our whenua and biodiversity. VUWSA also support the focus on increased planning requirements, as this will work to ensure that there is more adequate future planning around our three water systems. In regards to the overall distribution of funding within the Wellington City Council investment under option three, we approve of the over 400-

million-dollar investment in waste water, as this is a crucial part of fixing wellington's infrastructural issues.

Water and awa hold deep importance in te ao Māori, and to Wellington's tangata whenua and iwi. It is also a section of public infrastructure which impacts every aspect of our city – from environment to public health. Students want to know that they live in a city which is sustainable, and where their Council are taking reasonable steps to protect the future of Wellington's water infrastructure and environment, a city they will look to live, work and contribute to post-study. Given this, it is crucial that Wellington City Council prioritise an accelerated investment in the City's three-waters system.

3. Laterals

VUWSA prefer option two. We believe that the management and upkeep of Wellington's laterals is most efficiently done through the Council.

4. Cycleways

VUWSA's preferred option on building more cycleways is option 3: High Investment.

Whilst a majority of students, when transitioning between campuses, prefer to utilise public transport, VUWSA believes that the current lack of student uptake around cycling is due to routes being inaccessible and unsafe.

We believe that improving the safety of cycleways should be a priority funding allocation. Students who utilise cycleways are prone to unsafe conditions when travelling on sparsely illuminated and narrow cycleways. This risk is exacerbated during the winter when it gets dark much earlier during the day and weather conditions are more extreme.

VUWSA would like to see cycleways well lit, so that the entire route is completely illuminated, and wide enough to comfortably accommodate cyclists and pedestrians. In any instance, cycleways should not come at the expense of pathways. We believe that creating physical and clear barriers separating cycleways and walkways greatly reduces the risk of an accident. Paths purposefully allocated for a particular use avoids traffic confusion and reduces path congestion.

We implore Council to include central city cycling feasibility, within any programme to build more cycleways, as this will increase accessibility for cycling between campuses and the inner-city suburbs. The absence of cycleways surrounding Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University Campuses at Kelburn, Pipitea and Te Aro, doesn't make cycling to university accessible or appropriate. Currently, students who cycle onto campus are required to cycle on the main road with motor vehicles. This is a significant safety hazard for students, particularly during peak hours, and prohibits our ability to opt in favour of cycling to, from and in between campuses.

We do however want to note, that while increasing accessibility and safety of cycleways is of importance, as students continue to get pushed out of the central city, public transport will continue to be the primary mode of transportation and more must be done to make such accessible for students.

VUWSA believes there is great environmental and wellbeing value in any effort to make Wellington more accessible and less car focused.

5. Te Ngakau Civic Precinct, Council Office Building

VUWSA advocates for Option 1: the demolition of the MOB and CAB buildings and construction of new buildings in their place. This is because it would avoid the exorbitant costs involved in strengthening the current buildings, while filling the gap left by the futile buildings in this important Council area.

VUWSA sees a benefit in housing the Te Koki School of Music within the new MOB buildings. This places the NMC in Wellington's cultural and artistic centre, revitalizing the Civic Square. Students are attracted to Wellington as it is the cultural capital, and has a bustling creative sphere. Therefore, we want to affirm the importance of restoring the CBD's cultural institutions.

6. Library

VUWSA's preferred option for Decision 6 is Option 3: strengthening the library now by increasing rates further.

VUWSA supports the option of fixing the library as soon as possible as the loss of the library has been a great detriment to the student community over the past few years. We would like to see the library re-opened by 2025 rather than 2028 as this is a gap that needs to be filled. The library provides a safe, warm space for students to study in and to participate in group work. There are no comparable facilities

in Te Aro that are easily accessible to all students, particularly for those who do not live near their university campus, or who are not university students.

The pop-up libraries that have been implemented in the interim are far from sufficient as they do not nearly have as many resources as the Central Library did. They do not house sufficient seating space, charging ports, and other facilities for students to use. Therefore, they do not spend as much time as desirable in them.

Another reason VUWSA would like to see the library restored soon is that it provided an inclusive space for university students, high school students, tutors and the general public to work in. It is advantageous for those who attend schools and universities or polytechnics that do not have adequate facilities to support all of their students. In this way, it is an inclusive excellent resource for all members of the community, but its absence has been felt by students in particular.

Although it is a politically risky decision, VUWSA would like to advocate for increasing rates to fund the strengthening of the library, rather than surpassing the debt limit (Option 1). We want to see Council make sustainable economic decisions, and leave room for future Councils to use the money they have to tackle important issues that will arise in the future. We do not want to see Council focusing on reducing its level of debt, instead of concentrating on bigger issues at stake.

7. Te Atākura

We support the full funding of the action plan for Te Atākura – First to Zero - Option 3. Anything less than this is simply not acceptable in 2021. Students deserve a city that is fully committed to reducing carbon emissions. We especially support the funding into the climate change response team and urge the Council to work collaboratively with communities on the front lines. Overall, we submit that the plan itself does not seem to go far enough.

Te Atākura – First to Zero should be a primary consideration in every major and minor decision the Council makes, and we have not seen enough of this throughout the LTP document. Sustainable procurement principles should guide infrastructure decisions. Adapting for the climate crisis should not mean that dealing with sludge allows other waste minimisation actions, like a strong focus on the circular economy, to fall by the wayside. A focus on Te Atākura also aligns with improving the reliability, efficiency, accessibility and safety of our public transport system.

8. Sludge Minimisation

VUWSA supports Option 4: sludge minimisation through alternative funding. This is an urgent problem that we strongly support swift action on. We need to reduce waste going to landfill, and stop pumping sludge across the city. 2020 demonstrated the risks of failing to act quickly on this problem. VUWSA understands that action on waste minimisation has been consistently curtailed by the ratio requirements for safe sludge management, and we are urging the Council to plan to avoid further expansion of the landfill and continue exploring better waste management streams, given the limited lifespan of this proposed infrastructure. We support research and planning into source – separated waste water and sanitation systems, as outlined in the submission of zero waste advocates in Wellington.

VUWSA has chosen to support Option 4, as we want the Council to embrace alternative funding streams. However, we have two primary concerns. Most importantly, if the intended funding stream becomes unworkable, we would want reprioritisation of funding to ensure that this project remains viable. It is crucial for creating a city that is focused on including circular loop principles, and to remove the current hurdles that limit proper waste minimisation for other waste streams. Secondly, we do not want the cost of the ratepayer levy being passed onto students through rent increases, given the levy will be collected for thirty years from Year 4.

Overall, we want to see waste systems that work for a city truly committed to Te Atākura - First to Zero. Waste is a climate change issue that goes far beyond emissions from landfill. This looks like embracing resource recovery centres, and addressing construction and demolition waste streams. We would have wanted to see more consultation on these elements, which we know are issues important to students and the Wellington community.

9. Key Upcoming Decisions

Affordable Housing

The current state of housing in Wellington is abysmal, particularly for students, who are often forced to rent low-quality, expensive flats. As rental prices continue to rise and housing availability falls, students are being forced further and further out from the central city, reducing their time and ability to contribute to the culture, economy, and vibrancy of Wellington. The lack of affordable housing is not

only a disincentive to students coming to study in Wellington in the first instance, but also to remain in Wellington permanently after their studies. If Wellington wants to remain a vibrant and student-friendly city, it must make urgent decisions in the area of affordable housing.

We urge the City Council to center the perspectives of students and youth, those who will contribute to the future of Wellington, in their Spatial Plan and Housing Strategy. We commend the work Wellington City Council are undertaking in their Te Mahana (Homelessness Strategy), however believe that the homeless community should be actively involved in these conversations. Any solutions to the problem of homelessness must be co-designed alongside the homeless community of Wellington. Progressive and genuine partnership is the most effective means for long-lasting and progressive change.

Let's Get Wellington Moving

Public transport that is accessible for all is pivotal for Wellington's student's population, who often rely on public transport and safely-lit pedestrianized areas to get around. The former will only continue to be of growing importance to students as they are pushed further out of the City Centre with the ongoing housing crisis. As the WCC implements the Let's Get Wellington Moving programme in the first few years of the LTP, we hope to see ongoing consultation and engagement with those stakeholder groups particularly impacted by the current state of Wellington's public transport, including students. VUWSA supports the ongoing commitment to improving Wellington's transport infrastructure, and the decision to shift to an increased focus on people and culture in the design and implementation process.

10. Consultation

VUWSA would like to acknowledge the extent to which the Wellington City Council have attempted to make their consultation accessible. The long-term plan was broken down into several simple sections, which allowed groups not already engaged with Council processes to gain a fairly robust understanding of the potential changes to our city. We are also deeply appreciative of the Council's attendance of local areas and bodies, and believe that this is a highly accessible and democratic form of consultation.

However, we believe that more work can be done from the Council's end in proactively liaising and collaborating with major community organizations to support them in gathering the viewpoints and perspectives of Wellingtonians. For example, if the Wellington City Council had spent more time proactively engaging with both the University and the Student Association of Te Herenga Waka, student consultation would have deeply benefitted.

We believe that this fits into a wider discussion as to the level of engagement the general public has with WCC. More engagement and co-development of engagement strategies with local community organisations brings the power back to the citizens of Wellington, and ensures consultation and engagement are legitimate and empowering. This is an area VUWSA is particularly interested in further exploring with Wellington City Council.

11. Conclusion

Wellington is a city with great potential to become a student-focused, progressive and environmentally and economically sustainable capital. The current proposals in the Wellington City Council's long-term plan are steps in the right direction towards ensuring that we continue to lead New Zealand in sustainability, cultural vibrancy and citizen satisfaction. Alongside the decisions outlined in the Long-Term Plan, VUWSA believe that the council must take urgent action on a number of key issues. In particular, our current housing crisis, lack of adequate public transportation, and inefficient waste systems.

We urge the Wellington City Council to take into account the perspective of the Wellington student population as they go about solving these growing issues. We believe that the options highlighted within this report will present the best outcomes for students, and will help to ensure that Wellington remains a liveable city for generations to come.