



Submission
of the
Victoria University of Wellington
Students' Association
on the
Golden Mile Improvements

Prepared by

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To	Wellington City Council: Let's Get Wellington Moving
From	Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
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Subject	Golden Mile Improvements

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1. Introduction

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) advocate for and represent the 22,000 students of Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University. Students, and often under 35-year olds, make up a large portion of the Wellington Central population. The way students think about urban planning is substantially different to the general population, as students experience the city in a way that is unique. Anxiety about climate change, the efficiency and convenience of public transport, and access to green spaces are all everyday issues for students and addressing these through urban planning is essential for maintaining a thriving city, which will be sustainable for future generations.

We are pleased that Wellington City Council (WCC), Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC) and Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency are consulting with the public on the Golden Mile and thinking about the long-term future for Wellington City.

VUWSA strongly supports a reform of the Golden Mile, granted this addresses the concerns expressed by students and young professionals. Any reform would have strong impacts on wellbeing, and should be centred around the principles of convenience, safety, and climate resilience. The reform of the Golden Mile would affect both the study and social experience of students - with many living independently or away from home for the first time.

Many students move to Wellington for their studies. VUWSA believe that these changes to the city will help retention after graduation, and allow students to envision the city as a functional space for them to continue to live and work in.

Reviewing the Golden Mile plan through a student lens is not only beneficial for improving the city for students. VUWSA strongly believes enriching the experience of students will further enrich the experiences of all and offer a forward-thinking perspective.

2. Cycling and Public Transport

Students are unlikely to drive around central Wellington, due to limited parking options and the cost of car ownership. Cycling is not a feasible option due to safety concerns, transporting books and study resources, and lack of secure bike storage in often cramped flats or apartments.

VUWSA wants to encourage cycling as an option, as we see its significant benefit to sustainable transport. Being able to cycle is fantastic for shifting the city to a sustainable living city. However, our priority is on foot traffic and public bus transport as this is most frequented option for our students. We consider cycling in Wellington to be largely restricted to the waterfront, and we do not anticipate the increased cycle lanes making significant changes to this.

As stated, students are most likely to use buses when moving within the city. Therefore, it is incredibly important to us that public transport is accessible. It is important that bus drivers are aware of various disability needs, and ensuring they are carrying measures to meet these, such as lowering the step ramps.

It is inconvenient, and often frustrating and stressful for students when buses do not arrive on time, drive past or do not arrive at all. These occurrences can lead to missing class, being late to work, or wasted time and productivity. Long waiting times for buses coupled with the frequency of student use of public transport emphasises the need for safe waiting areas at bus stops. These stops need to have shelter, lighting, adequate space and be well off the street to avoid vehicles and cyclists. Currently, students are placed in a vulnerable position, especially in bad weather or unlit areas.

Additionally, we think that there is scope in planning for other methods of travel. Such methods of travel could include a tramline down the centre of Courtenay Place, or Lambton Quay.

Recommendation: We support Concept 2 as it maximises the time saved on bus travel, and best meets the needs of students to manage their time, prioritising their safety, comfort and enjoyment.

3. Pedestrianisation

Students spend a lot of time travelling, managing part-time jobs, flatting situations, and study on different campuses. Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington has three main campuses, one in Kelburn, one in Pipitea and one in Te Aro. These are centred around the Golden Mile.

Walking is often the most efficient and cost-effective way to take these small, short trips. It is incredibly important for enjoyment, accessibility and efficiency that we allow pedestrian space to be maximized. During peak times, including the morning and lunch rush it is often a dangerous and frenzied experience to walk along these streets. VUWSA wants to emphasise the importance of the comfort and safety of pedestrians, especially as we shift towards a city that relies on the interconnection between public transport and pedestrians.

Recommendation: VUWSA believe it is important to balance pedestrianisation and public transport. For this reason, we support Concept 2.

4. Courtenay Place

Courtenay Place has a thriving nightlife, and many popular bars and late-night eateries. This is a unique experience in Wellington, and an important part of socialising as a student. Students also are likely to be employed in the hospitality and retail sector around this area.

We believe that ensuring that Courtenay Place is kept for pedestrians would ensure that students would be safer at night. They would not have to worry about traffic as they cross the street, and the larger space to move freely means that there is less chance of them losing their friends in a crowd. This may also create the opportunity for more city safety initiatives such as Take 10 and 'Don't Guess The Yes' activations.

Students often use app-based transport platforms, such as Uber, to get home late at night. Use of these apps are prevalent during these times, unlike buses. Buses do not run regularly at night

and can be an unsafe option for students to make their way home. Additionally, waiting for the bus late at night, in the dark, puts students in dangerous situations. This issue is compounded at the other end of the bus trip, where students may have to walk in isolated areas.

Additionally, VUWSA shares concerns about students with mobility issues who might not be able to access central parts of Courtenay Place if there is no vehicle access. We do not believe that students should be excluded from these experiences in Wellington because of access issues. It is important to ensure that any design of the Golden Mile takes this into consideration.

Some concepts to mitigate these issues include easily accessible loading zones, such as app-based car share and taxi pickup points. Additionally, we would like to raise that if Courtenay Place is pedestrianised, that there are more streetlamps or lighting alternatives. This will ensure that we encourage walking in these spaces, while still increasing safety.

Recommendation: VUWSA supports Concept 3 for Courtenay Place as it offers the most space to pedestrians and thereby ensuring better city safety, particularly at night.

5. Green Spaces

VUWSA believes that there should be more green spaces in the city. Students, who often live in flats or apartments, are already lacking green spaces. To facilitate community, we want to ensure we create structures and spaces that allow for socialisation and enjoyment.

Community green spaces can help build community resilience. When neighbours know their neighbours, support systems are already in place to make sure that the city remains safe and supported in the event of emergencies such as an earthquake or a pandemic. One only needs to look at the 2016 Kaikoura earthquake to see how community connectivity offers greater city resilience.

Recommendation: We support the proposals in both Concept 2 and Concept 3 in removing 100-200 carparks, as we believe these spaces could be better used to create green spaces. As outlined above, most Wellington Central residents and students do not own a car. Travelling by car is infrequent, and often through a car share service like Uber.

6. Conclusion

There is strong potential and important underlying principles in the Golden Mile Reform. When deciding on a final overall option, we took into account feasibility and time. We know that students experience the city in a transient way. We think they will not be willing to stay longer than the bare minimum to get their degrees if they do not believe that Wellington is made for them, and cares about their experience. If students find commuting unsafe, inconvenient or a frustrating experience, they will assume this applies to life in the central city as a whole. It is important that the Council is empowered to undertake meaningful change that can be actioned relatively quickly.

Overall recommendation: VUWSA recommends moving forward with Concept 2 generally, but with elements of further pedestrianisation as shown in Concept 3 for Courtenay Place.