

Submission from Environment Network Manawatu Incorporated on PNCC's draft Integrated Transport Strategy 2015-45

Contact details:

P.O. Box 1271
Palmerston North 4440
coordinator@enm.org.nz
06 355 0126
021 157 6177
www.enm.org.nz

Contact Person for Submitting Organization: Sally Pearce

Speaking to our submission:

ENM would like to speak to our submission should there be an opportunity to do so.

Environment Network Manawatu (ENM) thanks you for the opportunity to make a submission on the draft Integrated Transport Strategy 2015-45 which we see as a very important step towards a more people friendly and environmentally friendly transport system.

Background:

Environment Network Manawatu (ENM), a charitable organisation formed in 2001, is an umbrella organisation for a growing and diverse network of Manawatu based environmental member groups. We receive funding from PNCC (a fee for service), Lotteries, ECCT, COGS, and project funding from additional organisations. We currently have forty-six active member groups, forty of whom are currently based in and/or routinely active in Palmerston North.

A major focus for ENM is to help make "Environmental Sustainability" a reality for the Manawatu area. This submission advocates for measures that will lead to a more environmentally sustainable regional transport system. We note that these same measures are generally fundamental to social equity and to future-proofing our region for long-term economic well-being.

In this submission, our support for particular actions and recommendations for changes are based on the following criteria:

- Positive contribution to environmentally sustainable and active transport
- Reduction in negative environmental impact, resource use, fossil fuel use and vehicle use
- Community resilience in the event of significant rises in fossil fuel costs during and beyond the 30 year strategy period

General comments:

ENM supports the intention of the ITS to build upon commitments made in the Sustainable City Strategy to:

- increase the amount and use of public transport
- encourage walking and cycling
- focus heavy traffic onto arterial routes
- decrease the need for travel

And

- to maximise connectivity by improving transport, accessibility and neighbourhood, local, regional and international connectivity.

ENM wishes to note our support for some of the projects PNCC is currently planning or has underway extending the cycle and walkway networks in the city, and especially to any projects that give priority

to key linkages and ensuring safe routes. We congratulate the council for their initiative in this area and look forward to the separated cycle paths and walkways to outlying areas such as Longburn, Linton and Bunnythorpe, and also the cycle/pedestrian bridge over the Manawatu River.

The purpose of the draft ITS is stated at the beginning of the introduction: "The Integrated Transport Strategy supports transport choices as part of an easy to use and efficient transport system that meets the needs of people, businesses and the environment."

ENM agrees that the transport system is there first and foremost to meet the needs of people (including the particular needs of people in business). We submit that the transport system needs to do this in a much more environmentally sustainable way than the present situation.

As noted in various parts of the draft ITS, there are clear environmental reasons why our reliance on private vehicles and use of fossil fuels should be reduced, including the effect of greenhouse gases on the global climate, localised air and noise pollution, traffic congestion and the impacts of large amounts of land being taken up with road and parking infrastructure including the large amount of run-off from these impervious surfaces into storm water.

Transport is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Palmerston North. At the time of writing, the 2010 PNCC Sustainable City Strategy predicted that transportation was expected to contribute more than 58% of all greenhouse gas emissions in the City in 2010.

ENM notes that the draft ITS document assumes population and economic growth, a continued and heavy reliance on private motor vehicles and an increasing number of larger trucks over the next 30 years. ENM questions assumptions in the draft ITS about growth in next 30 years. We also have concerns about the Council's Strategic Investment Priorities.

P2: Council's strategic investment priorities:

- "supporting economic development and connectivity, including as a freight distribution hub, major retail centre, and health, defence and education
- providing for industrial and residential growth, including extension of the urban area into previously rural areas, such as Whakarongo and extension of the North East Industrial area,
- meeting the needs of vulnerable and other non-car road users, such as people walking, cycling
- heavy and over dimension vehicles."

ENM notes that PNCC does not consider investment in environmental sustainability to be a strategic priority.

It is not clear how the Council's investment priorities have been arrived at, how these relate to the strategic framework that the ITS will sit within, especially the Sustainable City Strategy, and how these will be applied. We are concerned that the above omission will mean that actions within the ITS to promote greater environmental sustainability will be given lower priority as the ITS is implemented over time.

We recommend that words to the effect of "improving the environmental sustainability of the transport system" be added as the first priority on the list.

We also recommend that the third priority is rewritten to recognise that non-car users include users of public transport, and that the proportion of non-car users is likely to grow significantly as a proportion of the population over the next 30 years. There is evidence of a trend towards decreasing dependency on private motor vehicles, as referenced in the PNCET submission, partly due to an aging population but also to declining rates of ownership of cars among younger people, as identified by the Ministry of Transport. There is also significant growth internationally in the use of electrically powered transport modes, particularly ebikes.

As acknowledged in the draft ITS, the decline in global oil supply (and likely volatility in the price of oil) will continue over time and impact on the economy. We submit that moving steadily towards more sustainable and energy-efficient transport solutions is essential for the economic and social resilience and wellbeing of the city, as well as for the environment.

We note that there is already evidence of a local (and global) trend towards a weaker relationship between economic activity and fuel use since 2000, as noted in the Palmerston North City Environmental Trust (PNCET) submission to the draft ITS.

We strongly support inclusion of the monitoring section in the ITS (pp 37-38). This section would benefit from the insertion of targets. We do not accept that the community's heavy reliance on private motor vehicle needs to continue (as reflected in the expectation that car and van registrations numbers will rise). An additional indicator to show the intended increase in rail freight relative to road freight needs to be included. We also strongly recommend that regular progress reports based on monitoring data are made available to members of the general public as the strategy is implemented.

The remainder of our submission focuses on the three drivers and actions identified in the draft ITS

Driver 1: Optimise use access and movement (pp 22-25)

ENM generally supports the actions in this section. We have the following specific comments to make:

Increased Passenger Transport use:

We strongly support the intention to advocate for the improvements listed.

As well as advocating for the retention and improvement of rail links, and in anticipation of increasing numbers of people using public transport over time, we recommend PNCC makes provision for a potential future hub at the railway station. Such a hub would enable rail transport to be better integrated with other forms of more sustainable transport, such as bus services or facilities for people travelling by bicycle.

We also strongly recommend that the provision of a Central City Bus terminal for urban and regional buses be given a high priority and be achieved as soon as possible. The current setup in the Square for regional services in particular is not going to encourage more people to use regional services. There is not enough shelter for people waiting for buses or transferring buses in cold/wet/windy weather. This can also give visitors a poor first impression of the City (as does the limited number of toilets available at the iSite after-hours.)

We recommend locating regional bus services next to suburban to make it possible for passengers to transfer themselves and luggage from one to the other rather than depending on a private car to get them to and from the regional bus.

Integrated parking management:

We support the implementation of the Parking Management Plan and the intention to reduce the amount of land allocated to parking.

Improve freight network

We support actions that will direct trucks away from most residential roads to priority freight routes and strongly support actions to reduce the amount of freight carried by road by increasing the amount of freight carried by rail.

Driver 2: Encourage Cycling and Walking (pp 26-32)

ENM strongly supports all the actions to encourage walking and cycling. There are multiple community benefits to be had from more people getting about using active transport.

We consider driver 2 to be the most important driver in the plan as it achieves all 3 drivers. It achieves Driver 1 because more people on bikes or on foot will reduce congestion and the need for parking, enabling remaining motor vehicles to travel more efficiently. It achieves driver 3, as roads wear out much less from people walking or on a bike. Also active transport modes are not subject to fuel volatility and will lead to greater environmental sustainability.

We have some additional points to make:

Increase priority given to commuter cycling:

We strongly support this intention.

Comments on the reasons given for why more people don't cycle (p 28):

- We disagree that there is limited space on our roads. Much of the conflict in the stretches between intersections is from parked cars.
- We'd also like to highlight the fact that people on bikes use them not just to commute to work (or to education) but to go to all the places that other people travel to – eg to cafes, to visit friends, to visit people in hospital and so on.
- We expect that electric bikes will become increasingly popular and affordable and this will make cycling more accessible to a proportion of the population, increasing the range and speed of their travel on a bike, and enable less fit or physically able people to get around more easily by this mode.
- We submit that safety issues, perceived and real, are the main reason why more people don't cycle. The network is perceived as dangerous by many people regardless of what statistics say.
- The cycling pedestrian bridge over river will help make cycling/pedestrian transport more efficient and appealing than private car when crossing river

More on cycling safety:

The priority on road cycle network (p 30) has many actual gaps that the map fails to show.

Under the road user hierarchy some priority on road cycling routes (p30) are also arterial routes (p 39) Eg Featherston St and part of Ruahine Street are minor arterials and Summerhill Drive is an arterial route. Such areas are dangerous for cyclists without adequate separation from traffic, especially from heavy vehicles, which take up so much of the traffic lane and need so much turning room at intersections. These routes have been the sites of at least 2 fatal accidents where a people on bikes were killed in a collision with a truck – at Summerhill Drive in 2014 and at the intersection of Ruahine and Featherston Streets (next to the Mobile Service Station) some years ago.

It is very important that the ITS results in a plan to resolve conflict points. For example where there are cycle lanes closed to parked cars the person on the bike risks either being hit by an opening door (and potentially being thrown into the path of an oncoming vehicle) or of being passed too closely or clipped by an oncoming vehicle. And the cycle lane from Fitzherbert Bridge into the Square is dangerous because, due to their size and the narrowness of the lanes, heavy vehicles in the outer lane are forced to travel right up against the edge of the cycle lane – leaving little room for error (or wind gusts) should a person on an adjacent bike not keep well to the left of that lane.

To make cycling safer and to encourage more people onto bikes we submit some areas on priority cycle routes will need to become parking free areas and/or require physically separated cycle paths, especially where there is heavy traffic. In some streets separated cycle lanes could be created by creating cycle paths on the inside of the row of parked cars. Whatever method is used it is important that priority cycle (and walking) routes are designed to be safe throughout rather than just in parts. As noted on p 28 of the draft ITS, the walking and cycling network is only as good as the weakest link on each route.

Also - different kinds of people on bikes who require different levels of infrastructure. Many parents may not let their kids ride to school until there are separated pathways.

We note that greater use of rail for freight could also form part of any solution to the problem of lack of space on the network

P 31 – Re: “Success will look like”: more people cycling and walking. We support this however we submit that the ITS should be aiming for a significant increase in people engaged in active transport – for all of the benefits this will bring to the City. ENM would support a target of 10% cycling by 2020?

To help achieve this we recommend that councillors, transport planners, and stakeholders interested in more people on bikes need to get together regularly as part of the ITS to establish a plan for the best way to improve the city.

Increase priority given to pedestrians:

We strongly support this intention.

We note that although the draft ITS document includes the action “enhance and maintain well utilised priority pedestrian routes”, there is no map showing the priority pedestrian network within the draft.

A transport system that balances the needs of all users

We note that although walking and cycling are to be given priority in the City centre, the ITS map doesn't include any priority cycle routes that go right into the centre of town.

Reviewing intersections against best practice design is a particularly important action.

Road safety education programmes are particularly important. One area that needs more attention is the difficulty people on bikes have in moving out into a right hand lane ready to make a right hand turn on busy roads. Some people driving cars are considerate and will ease back on the accelerator to create a gap, but many won't.

Increase priority to children walking and cycling to school

We fully support this intention. We agree that speed limits around schools are essential

Parents dropping children off to school (and collecting after school) is a major source of congestion on our roads. We recommend PNCC encourage walking buses as one means to reduce this congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to enable children to get more exercise. .

We also agree it is important to have a selection of preferred walking routes to schools and town that have safer crossings

Driver Three – Build resilience (pp 33-36)

We support the facilitation of rail connectivity to the North East Industrial Zone.

We support all actions listed under the “change sought” – “environmentally sustainable transport system.”

We note that the just released Regional Land Transport Plan 2015-25 identifies the effective integration of transport and land use planning in growth areas of the Region as a priority (Policy 3.2) and that a 'Decrease in tonnes of CO2 emitted from domestic transport per capita' is a measure of success (p 33).

We strongly recommend PNCC adds this measure to the ITS as “what success looks like” for an environmentally sustainable transport system.

It is good that that district planning prioritises residential and urban density as a means of improving transport efficiency. Where new suburbs are to be built (as in the case of Wahakarongo, p6) we would also expect that infrastructure to facilitate ease of cycling, walking and the use of public transport be incorporated into the design of these areas from the early stages to provide attractive alternatives to the private motor car. For example, including alleyways in subdivisions, especially from cull de sacs, can significantly improve access for people walking to public transport and local amenities.

A shift to more environmentally sustainable transport modes should include developing charging facilities for electric cars.

We also submit that transport infrastructure needs to be made as environmentally friendly as possible. For example road culverts should not block native fish passage, and appropriate planting along shared pathways will both enhance these areas and encourage people to use them.

Closing:

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. ENM is keen to continue working with Council towards a more environmentally sustainable transport system as the ITS is Implemented.

Kind regards,

Beth Tolley
Deputy Chair
Environment Network Manawatu Inc