



Submission of Civic Trust Auckland

Feedback on O'Connell Street upgrade

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1 Overall, I am happy with the draft design proposed for the upgrade of O'Connell Street.

We support the following elements of the draft design:

- widening of footpaths
- removal of car parking spaces
- removal of "street furniture"
- installation of a public art work
- installation of seating.

We question the following elements of the draft design:

- removal of the tulip tree
- the use of basalt paving.

2 If you disagreed with the statement above, what sort of design/street layout would you like to see in O'Connell Street and why?

We would like consideration given to closing the street completely to cars, except for specific loading times for vehicles and for emergency vehicles at all times. This is already a pedestrian dominated street and becoming pedestrian only would help to make this area "distinctive and popular". We would also like to see the street made two-way for cyclists.

See also our answers to Q6.

3(a) Once upgraded, O'Connell Street will be a destination I would visit and bring friends and visitors to.

There are a number of factors relevant to whether O'Connell Street would be a destination, including its location in relation to one's home and one's workplace and how one can travel to it. In principle, we agree that an upgraded O'Connell Street will attract more people, with the including of elements we think are important in the design. Aside from the proposed artwork, the draft design may not result in this street looking very much different from how it is now, although it should facilitate ease of walking along the street.

3(b) The proposed removal of on-street car parking will enable wider footpaths and more space for people to walk, shop and sit as well as provide for outdoor dining opportunities.

Removal of car parking will naturally result in wider footpaths and more space for pedestrians. We agree that this is a good outcome.

4 The proposed design will make me feel safer and more comfortable in O'Connell St during the day and night.

In our experience, danger from other people has not been an issue in this street. As regards increased comfort, the fewer motor vehicles present, the more pleasant the experience for a pedestrian when passing through and / or spending time in the area, as less motorised traffic results in less noise and improved safety when crossing the street.

The wider footpaths will result in a more comfortable journey for pedestrians.

We do not consider grey pavers the most "comfortable" colour to choose, particularly when there is already so much grey paving in the inner city.

5 A public artwork, that works to attract more people to the street, would work well in O'Connell Street.

We support public artworks as part of the city streetscape. We propose that an artwork for this area should be the result of a competition open to every New Zealander, with priority given to Aucklanders. Certain stakeholders should be consulted on the choice of artwork, including those who regularly use the street and whose businesses are in the area. Criteria should be not only in terms of complementing the environment but also be the best use of the available space, as well as its durability in the face of city life, particularly as regards graffiti artists and skateboarders. The work should not cause a noise nuisance to those in the vicinity. It could have some relation to the history of the area.

Perhaps the art work could be a seat. We note the popular "Word to Deed" seat-art works in Lorne St and the "Chaise Lange" on K'Road.

Another consideration is to change the artwork regularly, in order to allow more artists to participate and for continued interest.

6 My comments on particular design elements such as the paving, lighting, seating, parking or loading provisions are:

Paving

We are of the view that there could be some relief from the grey that dominates the inner city and that "to better connect the area with the surrounding network of streets" might be to use the reddish brown pavers that feature in Vulcan Lane. This would extend the invitation to people to walk from Vulcan Lane to O'Connell Street. We note that when it was proposed to use grey pavers in the recent Vulcan Lane upgrade this met with opposition from the businesses in the area as well as the public; consequently, the traditional reddish brown scoria pavers were used. This colouring links in with the heritage of Auckland as a city of volcanoes.

O'Connell Street already has some of these scoria pavers on either side of the pedestrian crossing. An extension of these would form a natural link to Vulcan Lane, an area popular with pedestrians.

We support the existing heritage bluestone kerbs being recycled and reused in the upgrade, (a) because they are heritage items and (b) because recycling is an aspect of a sustainable city.

Whatever paving is used, it must be non-slip.

Seating

We support the introduction of seating. The proposed positioning near the Vulcan Lane intersection and Courthouse Lane seems apt.

We note that the intimate scale of this street with its relatively slow and minimal traffic assists the ability for people to be able to have audible conversations while seated next to each other.

Some of the seats of the type proposed for O'Connell Street have backs and some do not. We note that for people to linger longer, seats with backs are more comfortable.

Consideration needs to be given to sun, shade and shelter in the placement of the seating.

We question whether it is necessary to place bins beside the seats. Bins are not attractive and add to street clutter. There are bins in streets nearby. A sustainable city should encourage people to take their rubbish away with them.

Parking

We support the removal of all but four car parking spaces. Cars parked on the street obscure the buildings and the street life.

We propose that three car parking spaces remain and that the fourth space is given to motorcycle parking. This space would cater for more users than one carpark. The fact that motorcycle parking is not currently provided on O'Connell Street should not mean that it will not be provided. Motorcycles should be encouraged to come into the inner city, one reason being that they take up less space.

Bicycles

The street should be made two-way for bicycles, as is the practice in many European cities and as fits with the transport goals Auckland Plan, e.g. as stated in chapter 13:

"742. As well as encouraging Aucklanders to use public transport, the Auckland Plan incorporates measures to improve the safety, personal security and attractiveness of walking and cycling alternatives. Across all of Auckland by 2040, 45% of trips in the morning peak are targeted to be non car-based (walking, cycling or public transport) compared to 23% at present. To achieve this requires good street design and integrated planning. Cycleways and footpaths complement the public transport network and the single system approach. These measures will enhance the quality and character of Auckland and help build healthy communities and enable more active lifestyle choices."

"744 Increasing attention to the needs of cyclists and pedestrians will improve the safety of Auckland's streets and encourage people to commute by walking and cycling. This will benefit their health and reduce pollution and traffic congestion."

We support the provision of bicycle parking and ask that consideration be given to placing this under cover to protect bicycles from the rain.

If signage is necessary for two-way cycling, this should be subtle, and preferably on the ground, e.g. a plaque such as on the cycle path on Quay St instead of a sign on a pole, so as to avoid visual clutter.

Vegetation

We note that the tulip tree proposed for removal is not the only existing vegetation in O'Connell St as there are two bushes in planters on either side of the entrance to the O'Connell St Bistro. The tulip tree is not located in front of a heritage building. It is directly in front of a glassfronted shop in a modern building. It does no more to obscure the view of heritage than do cars parked on the street and if it remains in place it will serve to screen the parked cars when looking north up the street from the eastern side. There seems to be no good reason to remove the tree.

If this tree were to be removed, however, a better alternative would be to have a new pair of trees planted either side of the entrance to the building which the tulip tree is in front of. These trees would form a focal point viewed up Vulcan Lane to soften the façade of the building behind. The view through to Gordon Moller's consented building along Commerce Street to the harbour is an important element but is not viewable from the eastern side, therefore this pair of trees would not spoil that view.

We also propose that colourful flowers in hanging baskets or planter boxes be considered for the length of the street.

Street Clutter

We support the removal of the “street furniture”. We propose that consideration also be given to the removal of the pedestrian crossing poles. We note that streets of this scale in Paris, for example, use white painted stripes on the road only, i.e. no poles. We further propose no public advertising in this street, in order to highlight the heritage values.

Smokefree Area

We would like to see O’Connell Street considered as a designated smokefree area. This would help make it more pedestrian friendly, distinctive and popular with the approximately 75% of the population who do not smoke (as well as the majority of smokers who wish to stop smoking). We note that in other cities, e.g. Brisbane, parts of their pedestrian areas are smokefree. We observe that New Zealand is moving towards being smokefree in 2025 and that this comes within the 20-year timeframe for the CCMP.

Effect on businesses

The businesses in O’Connell St should be fully consulted on when and how the upgrade takes place in terms of ensuring that their businesses do not suffer during the time of the upgrade.

Public notification

Feedback for future upgrades and proposed changes to public spaces could be solicited by placing a notice board in the area outlining the draft design / plan and asking for comments from the public. This should enable a wider range of people to be notified and have the chance to have input.

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