

9 June 2022

Submission to Whanganui District Council

Open Space and Physical Activity Strategy

Te Rautaki mō Ngā Wāhi Honohoho

Introduction

The New Zealand Walking Access Commission Ara Hikoī Aotearoa (the 'Commission') is the Crown agency responsible for providing leadership on outdoor access issues. Our role is to provide New Zealanders with free, certain, enduring and practical access to the outdoors. We administer a national strategy on outdoor access, including tracks and trails. We map outdoor access, provide information to the public, oversee a code of responsible conduct in the outdoors, help resolve access disputes and negotiate new access.

Our Submission

The Commission congratulates the Whanganui District Council for developing this Draft Open Spaces and Physical Strategy, Te Rautaki mō Ngā Wāhi Honohoho. The Commission supports the direction outlined in this strategy which encourages safe, active transport connectivity and considers reducing our carbon footprint. The Commission also recognises the value of outdoor access, active and passive recreation in outdoor spaces, and the importance of access to open spaces included in the strategy.

This document shows detailed links to other Council strategies, policies, bylaws and plans. It clearly shows how the draft strategy will influence other plans and how the plan itself has been developed regarding higher-level strategies.

The Commission also strongly supports the emphasis on including the views of Tangata Whenua and incorporating te ao Māori and New Zealand European worldviews to support collective health and wellbeing.

The Commission wishes to make the following points on the strategy.

General

The definition of the open space applies to land owned or administered by the Council, which means rail corridors, the Whanganui River and the Coastline are excluded. However, these corridors and open spaces can and do provide for non-active transport and can also provide opportunities for active transport and recreation. The rail corridor at the top of Victoria Avenue is a good example of using a rail corridor to take active transport away from the roading network. Likewise, as an open space, the Whanganui River provides different opportunities for active transport and recreation. The opportunity for every Whanganui child to experience the cultural and physical presence of the awa during their school life would be an enriching encounter that they would surely cherish throughout their life.

Although not Council owned or administered, it would seem appropriate to acknowledge the role the rail corridors, the river and the coastline play in the provision of open space and physical activity opportunities for the Whanganui District.

The footpath network, usually on road reserve (but separate from the formed road), provides recreational and active transport opportunities. These are better away from a road but can still be regarded as an open space. Unformed legal roads can also provide open space opportunities for trampers and walkers to use and enjoy, as can the coastal pathways.

1.0 Introduction

It may be worth noting in the strategy's introduction that, although access to open spaces is important, it should be safe, sustainable and accessible by active transport modes. How access through open spaces is managed is also important for the safety and enjoyment of other users.

3.0 Background and Issues

Under the climate change issue, another opportunity for open spaces would be to provide pathways that encourage and enable more active transport. This would reduce the current heavy reliance on vehicles. Although walkway linkages are generally being provided in new subdivisions, Whanganui has an old network of pedestrian alleyways that could be considered part of a wider goal of providing more active transport routes in the established suburbs.

The same concept of providing more active transport connections away from roads, for example, between housing areas/subdivisions and to parks and reserves, to schools and shops, and links to other tracks and trails, would apply under the safety issue. Taking the conflict between active and non-active transportation away is an excellent way to improve safety for pedestrians and cyclists and has the bonus of improving the health of the active participants.

5.0 Goals and Strategies

Goal: Our whole community can experience and enjoy our open spaces, sports, recreation and play activities.

Strategy: Improve inclusivity and accessibility for all types of users of our open spaces.

Under this strategy, the Commission suggests a further bullet point could be added.

- Facilitate safe, sustainable and active transport options to our open spaces.

Summary

The Commission is very supportive of the comprehensive strategy that has been produced by the Whanganui District Council and appreciates the opportunity to submit feedback on it.

The Commission does not wish to be heard during the process. However, it would be happy to be a stakeholder in developing and implementing the new strategy.