



3 June 2005

Greater Christchurch Urban Development Strategy
c/o Christchurch City Council
PO Box 237
Christchurch

Urban Development Strategy Submission

1. Introduction

Spokes Canterbury, the local cycling advocacy group, is pleased to offer this submission regarding this very important planning project for greater Christchurch. We would be happy to provide any further information or clarification if required, and request the opportunity of presenting our submission to the Urban Development Strategy (UDS) Forum.

As well as our direct membership, Spokes indirectly represent over 15,000 people within the Greater Christchurch area who typically use cycling for transport every day (to work, education, shopping, etc)¹, an estimated 100,000 residents who regularly cycle for recreation², and of course the many people who would like to cycle but feel forced not to because of the existing environment in Greater Christchurch. We are also heartened by the 96% of Christchurch residents who support the Council in their efforts to develop Christchurch into a cycle friendly city²; this will not be fully realised unless a radical change in planning is taken.

We have based our submission on the public consultation materials, on the attendance of many of our members at various UDS public meetings, attendance at the UDS workshop run by Sustainable Otautahi Christchurch (SOC) on 14 May and from hundreds of years of accumulated experience living in greater Christchurch. A number of our members are also experienced practitioners in transportation planning and sustainable development.

We are very pleased to see this joint initiative at this time. Christchurch is at a cross-roads and needs to make some hard choices soon to avoid mistakes made elsewhere in choosing (or not choosing) its desired urban form. "Business as usual" should not be tolerated as the future option for Christchurch, whether by design, or by default through collective indecision.

Of the four options presented, Option A comes closest to our desired option (with elements of Option B), but we argue for a more sustainable plan and future. We also strongly support the submission of Sustainable Otautahi Christchurch (SOC).

Our comments are largely focused on the transport implications of the UDS, although we appreciate that this is intricately interlinked with many other aspects such as land use, urban design, and environmental effects.

¹ Based on 2001 Census and NZ Travel Survey

² Based on CCC 2005 Residents Survey

2. General Assumptions of the Urban Development Strategy

2.1 Population Growth and Distribution

We do not agree that the target population for greater Christchurch should be 500,000 people by 2041. A lower target should be set as a policy matter – rather than the “predict and provide” mentality that has dogged urban growth and transport planning in greater Christchurch for so many years. We are particularly concerned that the recent rampant growth patterns outside Christchurch City are not being challenged.

Growth in the outer areas is intrinsically unsustainable unless those communities become much more independent and do not rely on Christchurch for employment, education, shopping and recreation. However, the trend has been for the outer growth centres to become more dependent on Christchurch rather than less, putting increasing strain on our transport infrastructure. We would like to see strong limits on population growth and conscious decision making to not provide more road capacity to service an increased population.

Global population is expected by demographers to peak around 2040 or 2050, with a declining population thereafter. Why would we want to over-build our cities now in the lead up to this eventuality?

We appreciate however that population control mechanisms are somewhat out of the hands of local and regional government, so the key focus then must be how best to provide for these additional numbers. In this respect, limits on green-field development are more crucial than limits on population growth. In particular, higher densities (through higher population growth) are likely to support better public transport and make car-free districts more commercially viable.

2.2 Traffic predictions

We do not accept the UDS traffic projections of 40% to 50% growth by 2021, and associated congestion increases (160% by 2021 and 320% by 2041). The traffic model does not take into consideration the inevitable fuel supply shortages and price rises predicted by most reputable energy analysts, under what is known as “peak oil”. Global oil production is expected to peak within five years (if it hasn’t already done so) with inevitable instabilities in supply and price. Planning a car-dependent future for Christchurch seems anachronistic and foolish, not to mention extremely wasteful.

The predicted travel time changes also don’t seem to account for how behavioural change can dramatically reduce these dire predictions far more effectively than infrastructure provision can, as is demonstrated every school holidays. Irrespective of any future growth scenario, travel behaviour programmes should form a core component of future transport planning in the region.

By focusing on predicted changes in private motor vehicle travel times, the UDS work to date neglects the fact that cyclists and pedestrians are likely to experience NO significant change in travel times over the study period. Similarly, public transport on dedicated corridors (rail or busways) will also be largely immune from any congestion pressures on the general roading network. This clear strength of these modes should be promoted more widely and investigated in more detail in future planning rounds. The fact that all of the maps in the consultation document show the main roads but not the main rail or green corridors betrays the underlying biases of the strategy’s assumptions.

In addition, we believe a policy decision should be made to limit (and eliminate) traffic growth rather than accept what the traffic models predict. “Predict and provide” is so “20th century”!

This approach is not “anti-car/truck”, but simply recognises that a lot of those personal or freight trips could be either reassigned to other modes (especially if other equally suitable destinations are identified), combined together, or not made at all.

We should instead be establishing a model sustainable city capitalising on our small geographic size and our ability to be a walking and cycling friendly city with a travel budget for most trips for most people of 30 minutes by foot or by bike.

In future consultation materials, we request that the mode split (by car, bike, walk and public transport) be quantified for all options and for all trips. In this context, we suggest that a trip be as defined in the New Zealand Travel Survey (i.e. including all trip purposes and lengths). Traditional traffic modelling and transportation planning ignores many trips by foot and by cycle.

3. Organisational Structure of Urban Development Forum

We are concerned that the Forum’s organisational structure has no mandate to implement recommendations, and that this lack of mandate will result in compromised recommendations leading to “Business as Usual” by default. In Auckland, the Regional Growth Forum (established in 1996) had 10 elected councillors from eight local governments and was a standing committee of the Auckland Regional Council.

This clear organisational mandate in Auckland contrasts with the ad hoc and extremely large group established in Christchurch. Despite being twice as large as Auckland’s committee (for a population of about one third the size), the UDF is arguably no better able to represent the residents of Otago than Auckland’s committee is to represent Aucklanders. The Auckland model at least has political accountability.

We are also concerned that the Urban Development Forum (the Forum) is not representative of the aspirations of the greater Christchurch population. In particular, we question why a developer is a member of the Forum, but someone representing sustainability from the non-government sector is not. The Forum appears biased towards more development. We support efforts by Sustainable Otago Christchurch to have representation on the UDS Forum.

We also question why Transit New Zealand is a member. This suggests that additional road building is a foregone conclusion. We would like to see public transport, walking and cycling much more strongly emphasised in solutions. Land Transport New Zealand (which came into existence in December 2004) did not exist when the Forum was established, yet it has a mandate to take a much more holistic view of transport than Transit, with its narrow state highway perspective.

4. Sustainable Transport for Christchurch

We would like to see a much more sustainable future for Greater Christchurch. None of the options presented effectively deals with projected congestion. A 30 minute car trip in 2004 is predicted to take between 44 minutes (Option A) and 50 minutes (option C). To Spokes, this suggests that we will have lost the battle in maintaining quality of life in Christchurch if travel takes 50% longer under any option.

All options are expected to require about \$2 billion preventing congestion from reaching these levels, but the discussion documents do not quantify to what levels congestion will rise if \$2 billion is spent restraining congestion increases. In future consultation documents we request that the predicted congestion levels and trip times be quantified.

The four options presented are not sufficiently diverse. Although a very unsustainable Option C is presented, presumably as an extreme “straw man”, there is no equivalent option at the other end of the spectrum to test how far people are willing to go toward sustainable development. Why not develop an option that maintained travel times at 2004 levels through increased road building, and one that also maintained travel times but used walking, cycling and public transport for most trips? We expect that the road building model would be extremely expensive, not to mention destructive to inner city neighbourhoods such as St Albans and Shirley, as motorways would be needed to accommodate the growth from north of the Waimakariri River.

New Zealand has obligations under the Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Even the most sustainable of the four options presented (Option A) has motor vehicle emissions increasing by 49%, with emissions more than doubling under Option C. We request that future UDS consultation materials include an option that satisfies our Kyoto obligations in terms of carbon dioxide and other emissions relative to 1990 levels.

We believe that the greater Christchurch area should be based on the concept of “urban villages”, where walking and cycling are real options for most people for most trips. People would design their lifestyles around their local communities, with longer trips being predominantly undertaken by public transport (with the ability to carry bikes if required).

Road pricing and parking charges would ensure that those who chose to drive would not be cross-subsidised by those who do not. Health benefits would be significant. We are already seeing significant evidence of obesity and other symptoms of an inactive society. None of the options currently being presented materially addresses this issue.

Our preferred vision for greater Christchurch suggests the “90 factor”:

- 90% of all new housing to be urban renewal; 10% to be new subdivisions
- 90% of personal travel by sustainable travel modes (30% by foot, 30% by cycle and 30% by public transport)
- 90% of school students get to school by foot or cycle
- 90% of major businesses, public organisations/institutions and schools have a sustainable travel plan
- 90 km/h rural speed limit; 30 km/h speed limit in residential areas / urban villages
- Greater Christchurch designed for safe, independent travel by sustainable modes for a 90 year old (or a 9 year old)

5. UDS Feedback Form Questions

The following questions are extracted from the UDS Feedback Form (with their corresponding numbers in brackets). Our comments are:

5.1 Which is the right mixture of new housing and locations (Q1)

We would like to see as little new housing in new subdivisions as possible. Even Option A (with only 60% new housing in urban renewal) is not sustainable. We would suggest 90% should be in urban renewal with only 10% (or less) in new subdivisions (green field development). New subdivisions are inevitably further from established centres (particularly Christchurch, but also Kaiapoi, Rangiora, Lyttelton, Lincoln and Rolleston). Greater distances from central Christchurch and town centres condemn their residents to car-dependency. Although many developers view that constraining outward urban growth pushes up property prices, they neglect the fact that the alternative is higher transport costs (as widely demonstrated by the international studies of Newman & Kenworthy). The net effect is

the same total cost to residents either way, but with a clear difference in other sustainability indicators.

A traditional “walking/cycling city” approach would suggest a central area of no more than about 5 km radius for reasonable travel by these modes. From central Christchurch, the only remaining pockets of undeveloped land that would qualify are in Hoon Hay – Hillmorton and Papanui – Marshland. Anywhere else would have to form part of separate outlying communities with full amenities available and good public transport links between them. In effect this already dictates that places like Hornby, Halswell, Redcliffs/Sumner, New Brighton and Belfast (plus more remote places such as Rolleston, Lyttelton and Kaiapoi) should be developed as fully self-sustaining centres in terms of public amenities and land use mix.

To help enforce this approach, a “green belt” should be reintroduced approximately at the 5 km radius from the Christchurch CBD. In many places this is already available via existing open spaces (e.g. Port Hills, Bexley wetlands, Wigram aerodrome). Because of the development that has already occurred around Avonhead and Bishopdale, the boundary may have to be slightly further out here, also providing a buffer to the airport. These open spaces will also help to provide additional recreational corridors for active modes and can link to other “green-ways” further in (e.g. along rail corridors).

By focusing on strong urban redevelopment around key suburban centres, the viability of using commuter rail for long-distance transport also comes into play. For example, nodes could be developed at Hornby, Riccarton East, Opawa, Papanui, Lyttelton, Kaiapoi, Rolleston and Rangiora, together with improved rail connections into the central CBD.

5.2 How much farmland/open space should we use for new housing? (Q2)

The conversion of farmland to urban uses is unsustainable. Once it is paved or built over, land is lost as green space. Option A at 11 Hagley Parks is the best of a bad bunch. Yet a sustainable option does not need to pave over farmland to create a vibrant and prosperous future. It is important to remember too that a significant proportion of new housing areas should be kept as green space anyway, including shared “commons” for higher-density developments and green corridors for movement by sustainable travel modes.

One significant opportunity that appears to have been overlooked in the development of the UDS options is the use of “brown field” development. Christchurch has very extensive areas of industrial and commercial land developed prior to 1950 that could be redeveloped for a variety of uses. This urban renewal is exactly the sort of redevelopment that should be undertaken, rather than green field development over farmland at the extremities of Christchurch, or worse, in more remote locations such as Kaiapoi, Rangiora and Rolleston and other towns. We believe that all Christchurch’s planned population growth could comfortably be concentrated into these areas, improving walking and cycling opportunities and providing a high quality of urban design at the same time.

5.3 How much should we spend on new housing infrastructure? (Q3)

All costs should be borne by the developers and new residents. There should be no subsidy for the infrastructure to support urban sprawl. The price of sections in new subdivisions should include a three-year bus pass for all residents, with bus services established from day one, as has been done in Boulder, Colorado. A high quality of urban design should be sought for any new urban renewal, which has recently got a bad name because standards are too low. The recently announced Urban Design Panel in Auckland city, to review all proposed urban developments for appropriateness, appears to be a promising model for Christchurch. Medium density residential redevelopment (say three storeys, with commercial premises at ground level) in the Christchurch CBD will add vibrancy and value to our city centre, and would also be very appropriate for key suburban centres.

5.4 How much traffic congestion is acceptable? (Q4)

Traffic congestion may be a short term solution on the path to sustainability, by encouraging people to live in more compact areas or to work and play near their homes. By reducing travel distances, more people have the option of walking or cycling to their destinations. We all know we can't build our way out of congestion, so let's not even try. There are much better things on which to spend our time and money.

5.5 How much should we spend to prevent congestion increasing? (Q5)

We should spend nothing from the public coffers. Already we are subsidising road transport to allow us to travel ever further by motor vehicle. Building more road capacity is a path to nowhere. Our increased reliance on motor vehicles also increases health costs directly through collision costs and indirectly through diseases of inactivity such as heart attacks, obesity and respiratory problems from motor vehicle emissions. Any extra capacity should be financed by road pricing and parking charges, with ultimately all motorised travel being paid for by the kilometre.

5.6 Which option gives you the best choice of transport? (Q6)

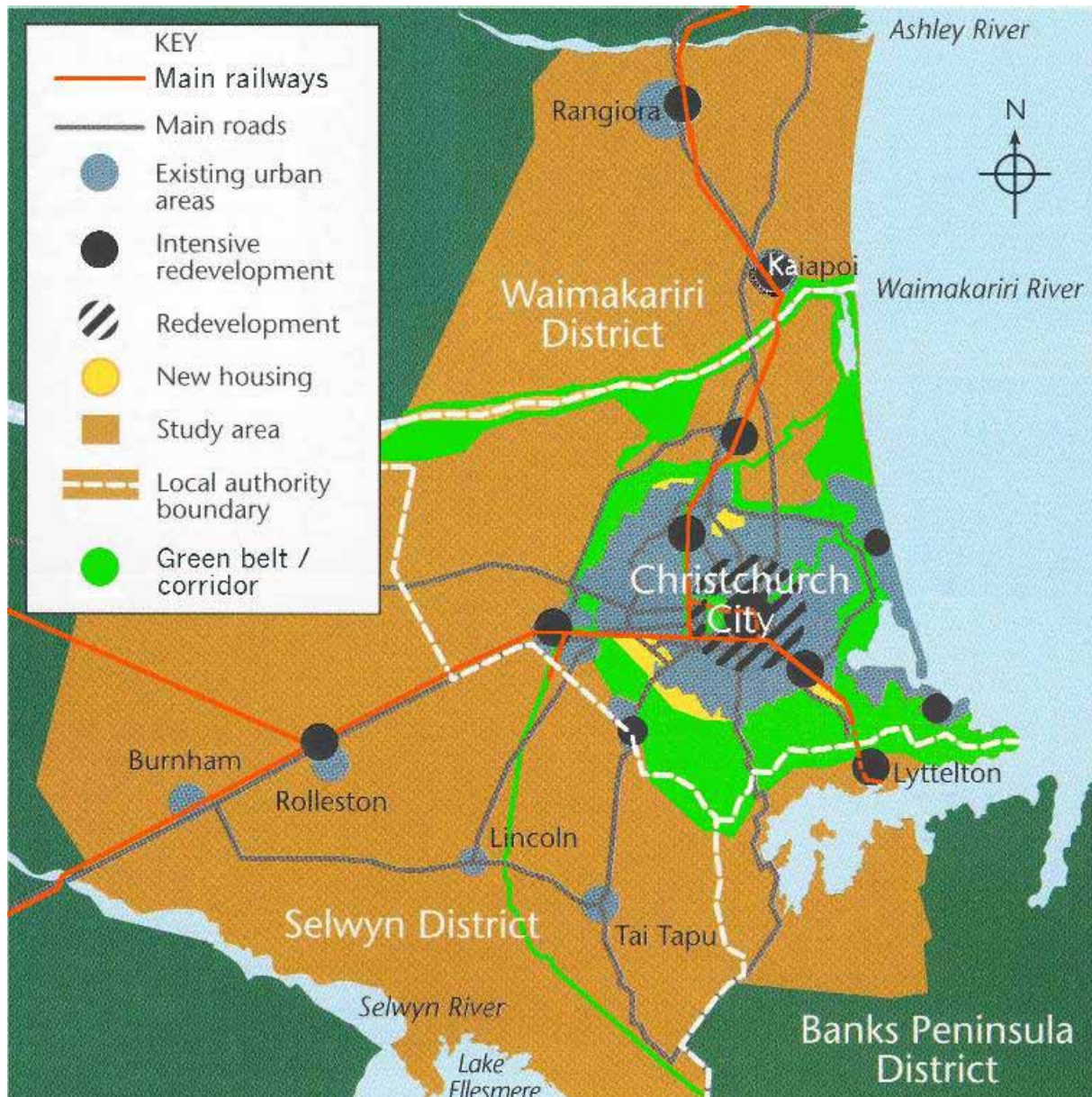
Option A provides more choice than the others, but is still highly dependent on motor vehicle travel. Option B adds the tool of largely self-contained suburban/regional centres (more suitable for walking/cycling trips), but still plans for too much growth far away from central Christchurch. We need to reduce the dominance of motor vehicles (characterised by both the speed and volume of motor traffic) in all our urban areas so people feel they (and their children) have the choice to walk and cycle for most of their trips.

5.7 Which option do you think is best overall? (Q7)

Option A comes closest but is still far too focused on green field development, and inefficient land uses and transport systems. It also doesn't promote more use of suburban/regional redevelopment nodes (as in Option B), which are needed to cater for those already living too far away from Christchurch CBD to be part of one central "walking/cycling city". We request that future consultation materials develop a much more sustainable option that meets Christchurch's share of New Zealand's Kyoto Protocol obligations and relies much less on private motor vehicle travel. Walking, cycling and public transport should be the dominant modes of travel.

The diagram below (based on those in the UDS consultation material) encapsulates many of the concepts that we believe are essential to a truly sustainable city (particularly in terms of transport). Note that it is partly an amalgam of elements in Options A and B, as well as new features. Key characteristics include:

- The creation of a green belt surrounding the core part of Christchurch
- Identification of key rail and green corridors
- Intensive redevelopment in central Christchurch and surrounding suburbs
- Strong redevelopment around key suburban and regional nodes, particularly those with rail access
- Very limited new (standalone) housing areas outside of the central Christchurch ring



We trust that this submission has clearly expressed our views and we look forward to the next stages in this very interesting and important exercise.

Yours sincerely,

Glen Koorey
Chairperson

Andrew Macbeth
Core Group Member

SPOKES Canterbury
Email: spokes_chch@can.org.nz

Spokes Canterbury (the former Canterbury Cyclists' Association) is a local cycling advocacy group dedicated to including cycling as an everyday form of transport within local and regional planning. The group is affiliated with the national Cycling Advocates' Network (CAN) and includes a number of CAN's executive members.

Website: http://www.can.org.nz/spokes_chch