

16/02/07
Wollongong City Council
Locked Bag 8821
Wollongong, NSW, 2500

To whom it concerns,

Re: Proposed Improvements to Wollongong's Crown Street Mall

The Illawarra Active Transport Taskforce supports option B of the proposed options for the Wollongong Crown Street Mall – that is to refurbish the mall and keep it open to pedestrians only.

We believe the most compelling reasons the mall should be kept car free are grouped around health, safety, accessibility, equity and environment. These core health values of health, safety, accessibility, equity and the environment can all be found in many places within WCC Strategic plan.

The belief that reintroducing the motor vehicle to the mall will alleviate security issues after normal business hours is inaccurate. Few – if any – strategies to address crime, safety and security issues involve the introduction of private motor vehicle traffic. People in cars are just as able to violate public safety as those not in cars, less likely to stop their car to intervene in any incidents, and may actually worsen the environment for public safety and security after normal business hours in the mall. Additionally, mixing people under the influence of alcohol with vehicular traffic poses serious safety issues.

Australia has long had an unhealthy obsession with private motor cars. Living in cities and neighbourhoods that have been designed exclusively for the car as the dominant mode of transport has been proved to be detrimental to our health by reducing the amount of exercise we get and by polluting the air we breathe; detrimental to our urban environments by using massive amounts of land, carving up and dividing our neighbourhoods, and inducing isolation; and detrimental to the sustainability of our transport by rendering us reliant on a form of transport that depends upon an unstable, dwindling and increasingly expensive fuel.

Wollongong is well placed to become a national leader in sustainable urban design, and to aim to be a leader in alternative, sustainable transport. Many strategies have been used worldwide to create liveable, safe, enjoyable, energetic and thriving CBDs, and none of them involve an increase in motor vehicle usage.

The broader urban planning arguments against reopening the mall to motor vehicles are significant. The arguments concerning the amenity, accessibility, atmosphere and life of the mall fall heavily on the side of maintaining its freedom from cars.

Better Health For All

63 Auburn Street Wollongong NSW 2500 Ph: (02) 4226 5000 Fax: (02) 4226 5339
Email: manager@healthycitiesill.org.au Internet: <http://www.healthycitiesill.org.au> ABN 83 964 176 052

The most obvious concern with reopening the mall to vehicular traffic is that of pedestrian safety. Obviously introducing cars to an area that has high pedestrian traffic increases the chances of collisions and accidents. The safest and most attractive areas to be a pedestrian are those completely free of cars. There are many examples –local and elsewhere - of actually closing roads to cars when an event will generate high pedestrian traffic. The ideal environment for walking is free from cars, and so the mall should stay this way. Passageways open to cars are susceptible to the same security issues identified in the mall – you only have to continue West up Crown street to see this. This alone suggests that the security and ‘lifelessness’ of Crown street after business hours is totally independent of car access.

Urban planning has a great responsibility to create urban environments that enhance citizens’ ability to walk as often as possible. Our country is in the grip of what has been called an ‘obesity epidemic’ and there is little doubt that one of the greatest factors contributing to this trend is a lack of exercise. Planning for cars for decades upon decades has led us down a path where driving is encouraged and walking or cycling discouraged - even for short trips well within walking distance – and where our cities and suburbs are sliced into disconnected pockets for anything but a car. All urban planning activities, including the refurbishment of the mall, should aim to maximize the ability to use active transport and discourage the use of cars.

Environmental consequences of our current way of life have recently begun to be fully understood by communities and politicians alike. Inefficiencies in the way our buildings are built and used, outdated processes used in industries, and our reliance on the internal combustion engine for most of our transport needs has culminated not only in wasted resources and polluted air, but climate change. Additionally, the insecure nature of the supply and price of oil means the days of the car being the best ways of getting around are limited. The planning of the future of Wollongong needs to recognise the needs of a city that can’t afford to follow deep-seated unsustainable practices of the past. Keeping the mall car-free is a symbolic and meaningful way of showing national leadership of the issue of encouraging active transport whilst limiting car use.

Active transport is by far the most equitable of transport modes. Active transport is extremely affordable compared to buying and running a car, and so designing urban areas where active transport is an accessible and easy mode of transport to choose means that a much greater proportion of the population benefit from being able to use that area.

Furthermore, roads designed solely for the purpose of carrying cars in the quickest time possible create suburbs and city centre that are unattractive, unpleasant, and off-putting for pedestrians. No one would argue that the small, pedestrian friendly (and often pedestrian-only) streets throughout many cities of Europe are vastly more attractive and walkable than the multiple-lane monstrosities that divide nearly all American, Canadian and Australian cities.

Redesigning the mall to allow cars through will also mean the demolition of some of the mall’s greatest and most loved features: the large chess board, the children’s playground, the water fountains and the amphitheatre stage. It is features like these that highlight the positive contribution to our community a pedestrian-only mall makes – the playground is almost always busy, the chessboard provides a wonderful area for people – and in particular older men and/or men from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The stage itself attracts a great number of people when holding an event and this can be expanded to help liven up the mall after hours.

The Wollongong Mall already is a jewel in the city centre of Wollongong. Just last December, Walk21 presenter and UK planning for walking expert Rodney Tolley, on a visit to Wollongong, commented on how lucky we were to have an extensive, attractive and thriving pedestrian-only mall.

The issue of evening and night-time security in Wollongong Mall is not one that will be solved by opening the mall to limited traffic. The greatest security comes from lots of people on foot, not cars. Wollongong has struggled with ‘hoon’ issues in other areas (particularly on the foreshore), and opening the mall to cars at night

could attract unsafe car driving behaviour to that area. Many other strategies could help resurrect the liveliness and activity in the mall after 5pm, and cars are unnecessary to do this. Active shop-fronts, mixed use retailers (with evening- and night- opening businesses like cafes, restaurants, bars, clubs etc), and adequate lighting and seating could all go a long way to address the current issues the Mall is experiencing. Cars are not the answer.

A major contributing factor to issues of insecurity and safety in the Mall after hours is the licensing arrangement with pubs and clubs surrounding the mall. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the ability to open until 3am allows these venues to attract a great number of patrons from areas outside the Illawarra, including South-West Sydney. I am informed that local police are aware of this. This issue would certainly need to be taken into consideration in the plans for the mall, and close work with local police would help come to a good solution.

A United Kingdom Government reportⁱ – identifies 7 ways to design out crime and security issues. They include:

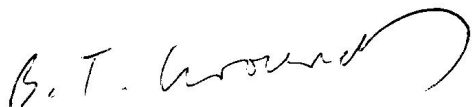
Ownership – places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community,
Activity – places where the level of human activity is appropriate to the location and creates a reduced risk of crime and a sense of safety at all times, and
Surveillance – places where all public spaces are overlooked

There are a great number of resources outlining the solutions to crime through urban design (for instance, see the ACT Planning and Land Management Department's Crime Prevention and Urban Design Resource Manualⁱⁱ). None of the design strategies for reducing crime rely on motor vehicle traffic being present.

I urge Wollongong Council to recognise the benefits of walking and cycling, and the negative affects of a car culture, and revitalise the mall with a view to it being a leading Australian example of liveable, thriving spaces being car free, healthy, attractive, and alive.

The Illawarra Active Transport Taskforce would be happy to assist in further consultation or planning around the proposed changes to Crown St Mall.

Sincerely,
Ben Grounds



Illawarra Active Transport Taskforce

Cc: Lord Mayor Alex Darling; Clr Alice Cartan; Clr Dave Martin; Clr Janice Kershaw; Clr Van Zanotto; Clr Anne Wood; Clr David Brown; Clr Carolyn Griffiths; Clr Andrew Anthony; Clr Tony Kent; Clr Frank Gigliotti; Clr Zeke Esen; Clr Kiril Jonovski.

* Membership of the Illawarra Active Transport Taskforce include: South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Area Health Service Health Promotion Service, The Heart Foundation, and Healthy Cities Illawarra

ⁱ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (UK), 2004. *Safer Places – The Planning System and Crime Prevention*. Thomas Telford Limited, London. [accessed online at www.odpm.gov.uk/planning]

ⁱⁱ Sarkissian Associates Planners and ACT Planning and Land Management, 2000. *Crime Prevention and Urban Design Resource Manual*. Australian Capital Territory Government, Canberra.