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## **NZ Automobile Association feedback on Queen Street changes**

### **Overview**

The NZ Automobile Association (AA) appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed changes to vehicle access on Queen Street.

The AA supports the objectives of Access for Everyone (A4E) and the vision behind it, and we believe that the concept of a more engaging, pedestrian-oriented central city is one that resonates with most Aucklanders. For that reason, we were among the 82% of respondents who voiced support for A4E when it was first put forward in the 2019 City Centre Master Plan Refresh.

We also recognise that further constraints to private vehicle access will be inevitable as the programme evolves.

But A4E must be developed in a way that is well-reasoned, practical and that minimises the impact on other areas of the transport network. The proposed changes to Queen Street fall well short in that regard and, furthermore, come on the back of an engagement process around A4E that has left a lot to be desired.

The AA would, therefore, want to see fundamental changes in the approach to A4E before being willing to consider this proposal.

### **Specific concerns**

The AA's concerns centre on the following:

- i. Stakeholder engagement

The stakeholder engagement process around A4E is among the worst we have observed for any transport-related project over the last decade. At a programme level, A4E has developed in an ad hoc and haphazard way, giving stakeholders little or no forward visibility of what is going to happen, or when (despite the best efforts by the team fronting A4E to keep us in the loop).

Far from delivering on promises to enhance the attractiveness of Queen Street as a destination, A4E has created an unsightly, uninviting streetscape.

Talk of a “co-design process” does not appear to have translated into a willingness to adapt the approach based on public feedback. The widespread view among stakeholders is that the A4E pilot is being imposed on them.

All of this has led to a deep erosion of trust and goodwill with CBD business owners, who should be the programme’s greatest champions.

In our view, it is unreasonable and unacceptable for Auckland Council and AT to expect to be able to advance this project further without first taking steps to address these missteps. Put simply, Auckland Council must ‘earn the right’ to take this project to the next phase, regardless of what that phase is.

ii. Stronger case required

In the background material on AT’s website, it is far from clear how urgently the proposed changes are required, and what the implications for bus movements would be if they were postponed or cancelled. Given the significance of what is being proposed, much more should be provided by way of justification.

iii. Essential vehicle trips

Similarly, we are concerned that the background material on AT’s website makes no mention of the profound impact that the A4E pilot has had on essential car trips into the CBD, nor of the added impact that the proposed changes will have.

We see scope for a great deal to go wrong if these changes were implemented, not just in terms of access for service and delivery vehicles (and the subsequent impact on struggling CBD businesses), but also in terms of:

- safety, as delivery people are increasingly forced to cross Queen Street on foot to get goods to their customers
- access for mobility-impaired people
- the likelihood of gridlock on the parts of Queen St that will remain open and on the nearby network, as a result of congestion and driver confusion.

Before being willing to accept these changes, we would need to see detailed analysis of the possible impacts.

iv. Wellesley St/Victoria St switch

Likewise, there seems a strong likelihood that the proposed changes will exacerbate confusion and disruption on the CBD traffic network as a result of CRL construction (and the requisite road closure) moving from the Wellesley St/Albert St intersection to the Victoria St/Albert St intersection. We would want to see analysis carried out on these impacts ahead of any decision on the proposed changes, and the probability of compounding traffic chaos only adds to our view that now is not the right time to push the A4E pilot further ahead.

v. The wider network

One of the pre-requisites of AA support of the A4E concept was that investigation be carried out on the implications for the wider transport network of constraining car travel through the central city.

In particular, east-west traffic will be re-directed onto the motorway network to bypass the CBD, and this raises important questions:

- How will vehicles travelling from the Eastern suburbs access inner-city suburbs to the west of the CBD?
- How will vehicles travelling in the opposite direction access the inner east?
- What will the impact of increased demand be on The Strand and other parts of the core of the motorway network?

Further, it is possible that A4E will eventually require additional connection points between the motorway and the CBD. If so, what would the impact be on the performance of the wider motorway network?

As far as we are aware, none of this investigative work has been done, and we would not be prepared to consider further steps in the A4E programme until it has.

### **Concluding remarks**

A project as large in scale and as bold in vision as A4E will inevitably throw up massive challenges in a technical and public acceptability sense. It requires a methodical, incremental, and sensitive approach, particularly at a time of such difficulty for the CBD business community. We would argue that the approach followed so far does more harm than good to the project's prospects of success, and that a re-set is needed before A4E is taken any further.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Geard  
**Senior Advisor – Infrastructure**