

Some Notes on Cycling in Dunedin

By Paul Pope - Candidate for the 2016 Dunedin City Council Elections

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The Peninsula Route

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the SPOKES questionnaire on cycling in Dunedin for the upcoming 2016 Local Government Elections. Living on the Otago Peninsula and being the Deputy Chairman of the Peninsula Community Board has kept me well informed over cycling developments. It's fair to say I'm the only Community Board member here that regularly cycles on our roads (albeit a fair cyclist). A significant amount of time and effort has been undertaken with the Peninsula project and by the community who have been very patient over its various consultation periods. They are now awaiting the final stages of construction in the coming year or so.

As positive as the community has been like all major capital projects there are still aspects of the design and implementation of this project that can improve to ensure that the project delivers a quality asset for locals and visitors alike.

As an ecologist I do have concerns over the loss of intertidal habitat in the Otago Harbour due to the reclamation required to see the road widened. This will be considerable and equates to 10-12 hectares of this important habitat. Continued intrusions into the harbour are not sustainable for its long-term health. Other impacts include the widespread removal of overhanging vegetation that supports roosting and hunting birds. It is my view that in order to mitigate the effects of such reclamation more work on habitat restoration, biodiversity corridors, monitoring and ecological trade-offs should be undertaken. Issues around bird wading, fresh water fish spawning sites from creeks, the extensive loss of small marine species and changes to the shoreline habitat through tidal change are very important to the Otago Peninsula and I do cast a somewhat cautious eye over these developments.

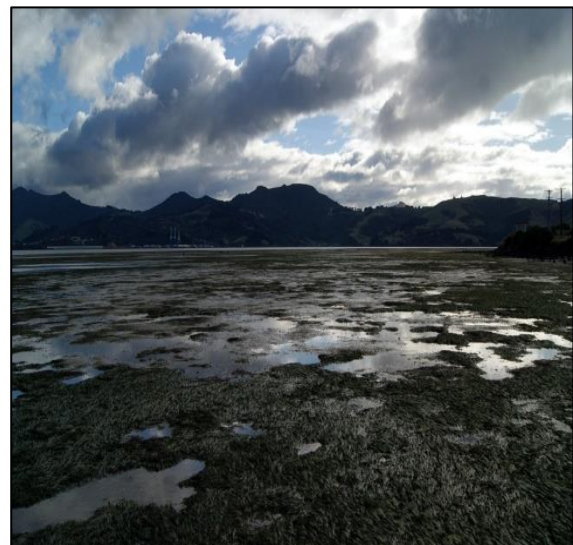


Figure 1 & 2 - Reclamation will damage the intertidal habitat of the Otago Harbour and decrease species such as this kotore anemone and the zoestra beds which are important flat fish breeding habitats

There is no doubt that the Portobello Road needs improvements for safety, but great care is required to protect the environment and the landscape in the planning and implementation of this project. The same can be said for the protection and integration of the landscape on the Peninsula and other areas where projects like this may occur. Landscape requires the careful construction of built structures within them, sympathetic revegetation, and the retention of "wild space." Other issues included suitable design to withstand storms and the resultant tidal "fetch" caused in periods of high winds. One thing that has come to my attention was the construction of the boardwalk at Harington Point Road which some locals feel was a major imposition on their views and ambience of their properties. In this situation more work must be done to keep people in the community well

informed. The other issue is how construction projects like this are perceived in relation to issues of sustainability. Look at Blackhead where a large proportion of the stone for walling has come from as an example. Clearly, cycling projects have not been the only use of this area and its resources, but we need to put resource use into context with issues around sustainability.



Figure 3 sustainability, landscape and resource use are important issues around the construction of cycling infrastructure and the perception of sustainability.



Figure 4,5 and 6 show examples of poor design and construction standards. Figure 4 is from Harington Point Road just 3 months after completion. Figures 5 & 6 are from the earlier constructed Macandrew Bay section. Note the use of the South African Iceplant in Figure 5 which is classed as an "unwanted organism" by Biosecurity New Zealand. The Otago Peninsula as a destination and landscape deserves better.

Will you push for, and vote through, projects that deliver on the Strategic Cycle Network as adopted in 2011?

In general I think that the overall concept of the Strategic Cycle Network is a useful one and certainly a good template for the development of a cycle network. However, there are limitations to some parts of the strategy that need to be ironed out to make implementation possible. There are also new synergies from other projects that may actually assist the strategy.

Town Belt Route

One route that I know well and love is the Town Belt Route. As the current President of the Dunedin Amenities Society I submitted on the Strategy saying that:

“... The route shown in the Town Belt was in broad terms a practical one; there were several problems with its interpretation. The most sensible and most practical link that offers a relatively easy traverse into the Town Belt is from Mclaggan Street/Serpentine Avenue to the proposed linkage at Maori Road/Lachlan Ave and the Queens Drive. This option provides a practical link from Princes Street in the Central City and the Town Belt for commuters and visitors.”

Over the last 3 years the Society has run the Town Belt Traverse a walking event from the Southern Cemetery to Woodhaugh Gardens over a course of 8.2 kms. The event attracted 500 and 600 people respectively and the Society hopes to make this a permanent interpretative trail. The use of roads in that plan has synergies with the planned cycling route.



Figure 7 Groups like the Dunedin Amenities Society have worked hard to develop the notion that the Town Belt is a recreational space and there are synergies between its plans and the cycling network.

Southern Commuter Route

My personal view is that we should be attempting to remove heavy vehicles away from the central city areas for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. This could be achieved by looking more closely at a heavy bypass into the industrial areas around the wharf, although a re-routing of traffic north would require significant investment. It's not easy having State Highway One running right through the city!

Caversham Tunnel

This idea has been around for a long time and I walked through the tunnel in the late 1990's. There is something very likeable about the re-use of this area, but it always seems fraught with technical difficulties. I wonder whether we're looking at this the wrong way and in fact should be looking at it as a heritage engineering project as the central focus with the commuter options as an added bonus. There might be better opportunities to fund this project externally if it had a greater heritage slant.

Design, Consult, Design, Consult, Implement and Review

There has been significant criticism of the design, consultation and implementation of various parts of the cycling network. That criticism has been damaging to the wider aims of the project. The South Dunedin and Portobello Road (Portsmouth Dr to Andersons Bay Road) projects have not been done as well as they could have been. Looking at South Dunedin with its primary and secondary schools on the flat, there was a prime opportunity to promote cycling for commuting and health. Sadly, that opportunity was lost because of poor design and execution. It is absolutely critical, that the City Council and its stakeholders get the design, consultation and implementation right first time. I know that you can consult until the "*cows come home*" but winning the hearts and a mind of local people is critical in any project management situation. There is considerable work to be done here to ensure credibility and a real need to be constantly reviewing design so that it's safe, practical and clearly understood by the community.

Priorities

Given that I'm from the Peninsula and knowing that our area is to receive its project as part of the widening project over the next year, priorities are a tough question, but these would be my choices.

State Highway 88 – Port Chalmers

My personal choice would be to see the existing connection of the State Highway 88 section with Port Chalmers completed. While this project is mostly managed by the NZTA I think there are significant advantages for Dunedin in seeing it completed. Currently, the Otago Harbour is an untapped and underutilised recreational resource and any opportunity to link the communities living on its edge would have a major social, recreational and economic benefit to the city.

Commuter Route from the North End to the University Area

This is another advantageous route that could generate high volume from students and staff at the University.

The Town Belt

As described previously.

The State Highway One Separated Cycleway

I'm very conscious about the safety aspect of this area given the deaths of cyclists and pedestrians in Cumberland Street and surrounds. As I said previously on the Southern Commuter Route I would prefer to see the NZTA invest in removing heavy vehicles away from the central city areas for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. That would involve a physical bypass and would take some time. For cyclists that time lag may be frustrating.

This is an issue that has polarized the community and is one that the NZTA and the DCC need to work on in more detail. It's my understanding that the cycle lane proposal will alter parking spaces, depending on the final option. I also understand that to mitigate this there is a proposal for the DCC to construct a commercial parking building. I have concerns over this, notwithstanding the cost but also that:

- This will increase the daily and weekly costs for long term or commuter parking which will force people to seek free alternative parking outside of these areas and thus create further pressure across a much wider area.

It has already been commented on in the community that due to the weaknesses of the City Council's *Parking Strategy*, higher numbers of commuter parkers have been inadvertently pushed out into reserve and suburban areas without adequate alternatives. This combined with sporadic and ineffective enforcement has seen an increase in congestion in wider suburban areas close to the city by long term all day parking. It's an undesirable effect that needs to be worked on in tandem with this proposal.

The other concerns I have are over landscape design. It is crucial to the reputation and look of the city that any design is functional and can be integrated into the urban landscape and will enhance the look of the city.

Perhaps the biggest unknown though is the future of Dunedin Hospital. The issue is what the potential re-design of the hospital might mean for the physical space and vehicle network in that area. It may mean that the design we have now for separated cycling is altered significantly in the future. It's worth considering this in lieu of the hospital rebuild, especially in regards to external parking and what the new hospital's new requirements might be. Because this is a relatively new development I would like to know what effect it may have on this proposal. It is only conjecture of course, but it's worth bearing in mind that the space we have now maybe quite different in the future.

So, in a nutshell:

- There is design, policy and physical elements of this project that need ironing out and defining properly to make it actually work and ensure we don't move one issue to another area of the city.

- The DCC must make itself very clear about what their financial commitment would be, should the NZTA proceed so that the ratepayer knows what is going on and what their financial commitment will be.
- The project must be future proofed to cope with physical or negative change in the current space when the hospital changes.
- In principle I support the concept, but in my view it needs refining.



Figure 8 my daughter Georgia on her first bike a million years ago!

I'm a very pragmatic person with a strong academic and practical background in the landscape, environmental and social landscape of the city. I'm an experienced project manager who likes good design that is well done, safe, sensible and undertaken in an open and collegiate manner with the community and its stakeholders. When projects meet those criteria the project will have credibility to the original purpose of the project.

I hope that this (rather) long missive helps to give you a better understanding of my views on the Cycling Network. I wish your organisation well and hope that we can work together in the future in whatever capacity the election brings for me.

Be safe, be seen and take care people.

Regards, Nga mihi

Paul Pope