

COUNCIL PROJECTS DESIGN REVIEW PANEL



RECOMMENDATIONS

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| Project: | Albert Street Public Realm (CRL) |
| Review Date: | 19 September 2016 |
| Report Writer: | Alan Gray |
| Report Date: | 22 September 2016 |

1. Overview

Auckland Council's internal design review panel, "Council Projects Design Review Panel" (referred to hereafter in this report as "the Panel" or "Panel") would like to thank the Albert Street City Rail Link (CRL) Project Team for their presentation, particularly Simon and Joshua.

The Panel comprises of experts and specialists from various areas of council such as heritage, arts, universal design, environmental, community safety, transport, parks, planning and Māori design.

The Panel can see multiple benefits of this project for the public, land owners, retailers, residents, pedestrians, cyclists, users of bus public transport and future infrastructure. Beyond urban design, the scope of the Panel's review is to seek to understand and form recommendations that consider the **whole life costs** of the project.

The City Centre Masterplan adopted by Council in 2012 states the following:

"Albert Street is perhaps one of the city centre's most disappointing streets, marred by several poorly designed, late 20th-century developments that have prioritised car access over the street's pedestrian experience. The result is an austere and utilitarian streetscape, despite some inherent qualities; the streets' gentle descent to the harbour's edge, the sense of enclosure along its route created by buildings (including a few heritage buildings) and several mature trees, and the resulting framed view to the water."

2. Executive summary

Albert Street is undergoing massive transformation with CRL underground and is New Zealand's largest single infrastructure project. CRL and the new bus public transport network will connect Aucklanders with the city centre. The delivery of this infrastructure and the resulting transformation and future context is the impetus driving a streetscape design that should reflect the aspirations of several major redevelopment projects and over \$2bn in planned development investment on a great Auckland street with moderate gradient and North facing harbour views.

Albert Street needs to be designed to meet the high expectations of a wide range of customers who are broadly represented on the Auckland City Centre Advisory Board (ACCAB). ACCAB provide the oversight of the City Centre Targeted Rate (CCTR) from which they have endorsed the expenditure of \$20m for Albert Street, subject to conditions. It also needs to meet the expectations of the Auckland Development Committee who have been supportive of CRL funding based on a range of pre-requisites such as streetscape uplift. It should have a balance of being able to function during peak public transport times and also provide a great street life. Also with more than \$2b private sector investment occurring simultaneously, it needs to be integrated and have quality front door experience.

The following are the fundamental issues that the panel discussed and the recommendations below:

1. Measuring against design briefing and principles
2. Data needed to inform design
3. Process and collaboration
4. CRL C2 and C3 Contracts
5. Staging the vision

1. Measuring against design briefing and principles

In order to develop a coherent and visionary street design the Albert Street CRL team needs to be explicit about the intended success factors in the project brief and design principles to assess against any design option. Neither the brief nor the design principles were provided to the Panel.

However, the briefing material does include a project Objectives Statement and a series of bulleted outcomes. One key principle that was discussed at review and needs to be clarified is what/who Albert Street is being designed for: What is the modal priority for Albert Street? Who are the Albert Street customers? And most importantly, what is the **vision** for Albert Street?

The Project Objectives and Outcomes emphasize "a great pedestrian street" with "broad footpaths", continuous bus PT lanes and two way lanes for general traffic. However no street can be all things to all people so achieving this is a very challenging proposition. With turning lanes and medians, the current design spatially prioritises general traffic over both bus PT and pedestrian modes, despite these having much greater capacity to efficiently move people around the city centre. Clarifying that principle and clearly stating the modal priorities will inform the design.

After 3-4 years of construction car access to Albert Street will have changed and existing levels of access may not need to be re-instated.

- **The Panel recommends the CRL Albert Street design team establish a strong design vision for Albert Street, clarifying the design brief and principles to achieve the Project Objectives and Outcomes for a great pedestrian and bus PT environment that reflects Albert Street's unique context in Auckland.**

2. Data needed to inform design

Additional data is lacking and needed by the Albert Street CRL design team to develop a coherent vision for Albert Street's potential. This includes models for general traffic and future pedestrian count analytics that reflect additional pedestrian movements as a result of new development; the 'second spine' business hub and increased pedestrian movements for rail and bus. The Panel senses the project team has underestimated the future pedestrian demand in Albert Street and request better data and modelling to support the design rationale, i.e. future bus patronage modelling should be compared against future pedestrian modelling.

- **The Panel recommends that data is collected to support a better project vision for pedestrian and bus PT outcomes in Albert Street as without it we are only telling part of the story.**

3. Process and Collaboration

Albert Street- between Wyndham and Quay Streets- has been through a rigorous design process, informed by a consulted Reference Design (ADO, 2014-15) and Detailed Design (Boffa Miskell, 2015). However, the current design developed since October 2015 has been developed without consultation external to CRL and AT Metro. The current design is a remnant of the former Detailed Design- but lacks design cohesion with long indented bus bays, turn lanes and an imbalanced single block of street trees.

- **The Panel recommends the CRL Albert Street design team intensively build on the initiated design session with Auckland Design Office, Development Project Office, Metro and AT TDO to investigate methods to achieve a more cohesive urban design outcome. The Panel recommends the Albert Street project return for review prior to progressing to C2 Detailed Design.**

4. CRL C2 and C3 Contracts for Albert Street

While the C2 contract for Albert Street (Quay to Wyndham) has been examined quite thoroughly through the Reference Design and Detailed Design process, this portion of the design has time (July 2017) and CRL control to be refined by way of these recommendations and collaborative design process going forward.

However, of much greater concern for the Panel is the pending approval of the C3 Reference Design in the next month. C3 for Albert Street includes the section between Wyndham and Mayoral which was not investigated in Reference Design and Detailed Design process, nor sufficiently consulted. The structure of the C3 contract is a \$1.6bn design-build, limiting Council's ability to inform the streetscape design.

This is significant as this scope includes the two eastern side slip-lanes, the median skylight features, footpath train station vent structures, Crowne Plaza access and direct interface with two major developers, NDG and Sky City. However, of greatest concern is the interface design with Aotea Station and its resulting effects on the pedestrian space on Victoria Street and Wellesley Street. The plans depicted at the panel review are the first Auckland Council has seen the implications of AT's preference for Victoria Street as a four-lane street. This is not a view supported in the 2012 City Centre Masterplan which is the council family and politically endorsed plan for the city that should be referenced by CRL. For instance the implications of shifting the Aotea Station closer to NDG requires further study. The

southeast “pinch point” at the Wellesley Street intersection is currently the city centre’s most dangerous. The Panel is not comfortable with the resolution depicted in the current design.

- **The Panel recommends that the C3 contract reflects adequate design terms for the Albert Street portion to allow for Council urban design to input into this element of work for Albert Street.**
- **It also recommends that Council be involved in the drafting of the documentation and completion of the reference design that will allow both informing of the C3 contract and ensuring compliance during the design and build process.**

5. Staging the Vision

CRL is being designed in the context of uncertainty with regard to major city transport including PT options and in a period of significant land redevelopment.

- **The Panel recommends that the design should be explicit in how it is flexible to potentially different scenarios as far as possible. This could include staging over the time periods used for example in the Bus Reference Plan 2016, 2026, 2036. At each stage, this process needs to interrogate the design through a lens of ‘what is certain?’ and ‘what is flexible?’, with the ability to re-evaluate the design in the future as policies, data, investment and renewals are considered to benefit Albert Street as a great street.**

6. Māori Design

- **Panel would like to better understand the level of engagement that the CRL Mana Whenua design forum has had with respect the Albert Street streetscape design, as opposed to other elements of CRL.**
- **Panel would like clarification as to how the Te Aranga Māori design principles have been incorporated within the current scheme.**
- **Panel questions the use of skylights within the raised median strip as the best means for interpreting the Ranginui/Papatūānuku narrative given the cost to pedestrian realm.**

3. Project Team specific issues for Panel response

In addition to the recommendations above, CPDRP provides the following recommendations to the CRL Albert Street design team issues as provided in the briefing report. (Note that many of the recommendations above overlap with these specific issues.)

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| 1. | <p>Managing movement in the city and expectations. The Albert Street Brief requires all existing movements be maintained.</p> |
| | <p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Albert Street CRL design requires an aspiration for mid and longer term opportunities with legislation, strategy and management mechanisms for the de-prioritisation of inefficient movement modes in Albert Street and wider Auckland city centre, i.e. General Traffic. Serious consideration of these measures might allow for the feasibility of inline bus stops. • The panel recommends further development of the design working together with PT Metro to explore how specific portions of the street are better balanced, for example the panel notes that Josh had indicated ways that indented bays could be avoided but no details were put forward. • The Panel expects CRL and AT Metro to model any support for indented bus bays against the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a design without indented bays first but with the design capacity to change to indented bays if required at a later date. • The concept design needs to be sufficiently robust that the addition of indents does not upturn the fundamental structure or character of the street design. • Further development of the design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Legislation for bus PT give-way priority over general traffic (a timeframe of 18 months was noted by Auckland Council Transport Strategy) needs to be considered in the staged plans. ○ Strategy that includes deterrents to the free and prioritised movement of private vehicles in the Auckland city centre (such as congestion charges) needs to be considered in the staged plans for Albert Street. These strategies are important as they not only prioritise efficient movement modes but incentivise use of public transport/walking whilst support the significant investment in rail and bus infrastructure in Albert Street. ○ Alignment with AT's development of a Road and Street Framework that balances street movement functions with place making and social and financial exchange. ○ AT investigating innovative methods to better manage or restrict private vehicle use during peak times on Albert Street, providing general traffic lanes, including reversible peak traffic lane scenarios, dynamic management of vehicles or peak restrictions. |
| 2. | <p>Reallocation of street space. The permanent removal of car park ramps onto Albert Street and resulting access onto Albert Street via Durham Street west only. Pushing the carpark access to the Crown Plaza carpark through Hotel porte-cochere and hold cars at the edge of the road reserve when leaving the car park rather, than right up at the kerb edge. Short term parking now restricted to streets/lanes off Albert Street due to bus lanes on 21 hour a day bus way. Are you aware of possible changes to Queen Street and access and movement restrictions for general traffic and improvements for pedestrians?</p> |
| | <p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel recommends a close examination of the space allocated to the private vehicle. Of particular importance - the provision of dedicated turn lanes and flush medians for the Customs and Wellesley turning pockets- both at significant pedestrian crossing points. Panel |

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| | <p>recommends these to be consistent with other intersections as turn/straight lanes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel supports the permanent removal of car ramps onto Albert Street • Panel supports adjusting carpark access to the Crowne Plaza through the hotel porte cochere and hold cars at the edge of the Albert Street footpath to prioritise safe, continuous pedestrian flow. • Further to the above recommendation, Panel supports improvements at the two access ways on the eastern side of Albert Street that provide access to lower level streets and parking. Panel supports the design for the entry and exit points of these access ways, however where they cross the footpath needs to be improved to give pedestrians more priority and be made safer, and also the provision of continuous footpaths on both sides of the upper roadway (Albert Street). • Panel supports clauses in the C3 contract to provide Council the essential role to input to the design of Albert Street, including slip ways, skylight median feature, key intersections (Victoria Street and Wellesley Street), and interface with key developments. |
| 3. | <p>Footpath widths. Can you appreciate that the design has sought to maximise the footpath widths along the Street in balance with other modes and restrictive widths of the Street? Do you have any suggestions for the broad footpath area outside the Crowne Plaza?</p> |
| | <p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel supports wider footpaths wherever possible as they help achieve space for movement and place, add to the character and scale of great streets and improve universal accessibility. Panel however notes that footpath width alone does not necessarily provide good pedestrian experience. See more on footpaths in point 4 below. |
| 4. | <p>Location and type of bus stops along this inner city component of the busway. Current locations and indented bays are due to scale of bus movements along the bus way. (PT Metro to present supporting rationale.)</p> |
| | <p><u>Recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel firmly believes the space provided for general traffic and bus indents are two specific areas that require more study in order to provide optimal footpath width for Albert Street. • Panel desires further information regarding the height, width and location of proposed train station vents in the Victoria Street-Kingston Street block. We understand these vents are very large and will have a significant impact on the footpath and street aesthetic. If these vent structures are not well located, the visual and functional impacts on Albert Street could be severe and irreversible. Panel also desires further understanding of any proposed venting structures or requirements associated with the median skylights proposed between Victoria Street and Wellesley Street. • Regarding general traffic, the block between Customs and Wolfe/Mills with dedicated turning and two bus bays is excessive at six lanes wide. By removing the dedicated turn lane (Panel recommendation under Issue 1), more footpath width is achieved. Similarly with the right turn onto Wellesley Street. • Panel recommends that the Albert Street design team investigate means of more flexible street design. Panel supports future proofing bus bays for buses, but also for use by pedestrians prior to network capacity or off peak to supplement footpath widths. • Panel supports that, if required, the most appropriate blocks of Albert Street are selected for indented bus stops. The proposed indented bus stops on the east side of the street appear to be well placed as close to half way between the stops at Lower Albert Street and on Mayoral Drive. However, consideration should be given to relocating the indented bus stops on the west side from their current proposed locations, thus as discussed above balancing the requirements for buses and public space. • The Panel recommends further investigation on bus stop locations that benefit public realm outcomes. For example there may be an opportunity to modify or remove the second indented bus stop between Wolfe and Customs. This stop is only needed at peak time. It |

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| | <p>could be modified to a kerb stop if general traffic was limited at peak times, or consideration could be given to dropping passengers at the termination/layover area only one block further north. Both these option could be investigated to get more pedestrian and tree space back on that block.</p> |
| 5. | <p>Trees. Current street layout proposal is in part due to space limitations based on more bus service requirements. What are your thoughts on trees only to area of Street as shown? Would you support trees in raised planters and accept they will only grow to a small to medium scale?</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel supports more street trees and suggests the design should allow for flexibility for change in operation but with a street treed structure that can be planted early recognising that these trees generally required 20 years plus to get to an adult form. . • Trees are a key element in Great Streets for People, offering scale, shade, colour, seasonality, comfort and shelter. Trees should be balanced with use of architectural veranda structures and a provision of clear sight lines for safety, retention of views and with flexibility of pedestrian movement. |
| 6. | <p>Cohesive material and elements along bus way route. Footpath treatment. Appropriately designed furniture along the route to help create a cohesive connectivity and sense of grandeur, upgrade of the street and useful place setting. Road surface treatment. Heritage trees to be reinstated. Would you support the ‘Harvey’ tree (oriental plane) outside Martha’s Corner being reinstated in the linear park opposite, rather than to the same location as presently on Albert Street?</p> |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel supports a view that the project needs to establish the structure of Albert Street correctly by establishing the kerbs, lighting and street trees as a priority over materials on the footpath and furniture that can added with future stages and redevelopment interface opportunities. • Panel supports an approach that doing a good design in mid-range material specification is preferred over a lesser quality design executed in higher specifications. The Panel supports the use of light concrete with aggregates recycled from CRL excavation as an option. Ideally a high specification material in line with the Great Streets manual should be used together with the good street layout. • Panel supports consideration and respect for existing material and detailing at existing Albert Street developments such as 135 Albert Street. • Panel supports retention of the Harvey Oriental Plane tree at the Harvey building as its value is linked to that specific location. Panel does not support relocation of Harvey tree into Victoria Street. • Panel supports that, if required, the most appropriate blocks of Albert Street are selected for indented bus stops. The proposed indented bus stops on the east side of the street appear to be well placed clear of Quay West and Stanford Plaza Hotel. However, consideration should be given to relocating the indented bus stops on the west side from their current proposed locations to the Wolfe Street-Swanson Street block and Wyndham Street-Kingston block instead. These alternative locations would put the bus stops outside buildings less likely to be adversely impacted by the congregation of people and bus movements and would also offset the bus stops, minimising impacts to any single block of the street. These alternate locations would also open up the potential for street trees to be planted on both sides of the Customs Street-Wolfe Street/Mills Lane block (with removal Customs Street dedicated turn lane recommendation under Issue 1 was also acted upon) and for street trees to be planted on the west side of the Swanson Street-Wyndham Street block, thereby distributing street trees more evenly and widely down the street. |

4. Summary /Closing Remarks

Despite an initially bold and collaborative design process, the current Albert Street design reviewed by the Panel is underwhelming and requires effort to get back on track to avoid returning to the austere and utilitarian condition where the street started. Furthermore the design falls short on achieving many of the project objectives as presented in the briefing report.

It was very helpful having Joshua and Debajeet provide input at this session and we would like to request AT Metro's direct involvement on key city centre projects in the future.

| | Name & sign off: | Signature | Date: |
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