

Engineers for Social Responsibility Submission on the Draft 2018 GPS on Land Transport

Engineers for Social Responsibility Inc. (ESR) is an independent group of engineers who consider that being knowledgeable in the field of technology means that they also have a special obligation to the public at large. This includes raising the awareness of the engineering profession to the consequences of its activities and explaining to and discussing with the public the ramifications of developments in engineering and engineering works.

ESR is pleased to see a move away from excessive reliance on road construction towards an approach which places more emphasis on investment in public transport, walking and cycling and supports more efficient land use development less reliant on travel by car. ESR also supports a greater emphasis on travel demand management, and on measures to reduce environmental effects including greenhouse gas emissions.

Road Safety

A greater emphasis on improving road safety on high risk state highways, local roads and around schools is entirely appropriate, as is increased investment in footpaths and cycleways.

Encouraging freight to be transported by rail rather than road will assist in improving road safety by reducing the number of truck movements.

The provision of improved public transport services, ideally accompanied by lower fares, will also assist by reducing the amount of car travel. In this regard it is noted that elderly drivers have a relatively high crash rate per km travelled, and measures to encourage and enable this group to use public transport can be particularly beneficial.

Land Use Development

ESR strongly supports measures that are aimed at encouraging land use forms that support and encourage more use of public transport, walking and cycling.

Removal of RONS

ESR is pleased to see the removal of funding support for the proposed additional "Roads of National Significance". Many of the so-called Roads of National Significance projects are very poor value for money.

Greater funding of local (non-state highway) arterial roads is supported as it is much needed.

Environment

ESR strongly supports action to encourage a greater uptake of low-emission vehicles and particularly electric vehicles, but notes that the measures identified are largely of a general nature. The GPS should state specifically that relevant GHG emission targets developed by

the proposed Climate Change Commission will be included in the second stage GPS if practical or, failing this, in the next GPS.

Rapid Transit

Mode neutrality in investment decisions makes sense. For too long investment decisions have been driven by political dogma favouring one mode (typically cars) over other forms of travel. Mode neutrality should, however, be accompanied by technology neutrality.

The GPS allocates several billion dollars towards the future development of Auckland's rapid transit system. While the GPS does not indicate how this is to be achieved, press releases refer to light rail, and one of Labour's key election promises was to build light rail from the CBD to the Airport. The preferred route includes a section along Dominion Road. Light rail (LRT) is a very attractive but highly capital-intensive technology. To be successful it needs to have a right-of-way which enables it to operate independently of congested traffic routes, and it needs to be accompanied by high density, mixed use development around stations.

An LRT line along Dominion Road would require significant widening at stops and at intersections to avoid light rail vehicles being delayed by general traffic. If there are plans for high density mixed used development along Dominion Road, they have not been made public.

The high passenger carrying capacity quoted for light rail along Dominion Road in various documents assumes a high proportion of standing passengers in peak periods. Light rail vehicles typically do not have much room for luggage, and this further reduces the technology's attractiveness for Airport travel.

The GPS Strategic Direction includes Value for Money. Decisions on future rapid transit technologies, routes and priorities must be based on thorough, objective analysis to ensure an efficient and effective use of available funds.

Traffic Congestion

The Draft GPS make reference to measures to reduce traffic congestion. The reality is that traffic congestion is a fact of life in successful cities. Investment in high quality public transit can provide attractive alternatives to travel by car enabling more people to access a destination such as a city centre or major employment area without the need for further road construction. When accompanied by other measures such as parking reduction, it can free up road space in a city centre for walking, cycling, and landscaping. Traffic congestion on the corridors leading to the city centre may not have changed significantly, but the centre has become a more attractive place to visit and do business. A focus on traffic congestion as the measure of success could reach the wrong conclusion.

Rail

It is appropriate that rail funding be included in the National Land Transport Fund. Decisions on funding rail or roads should be placed on a level playing field. This particularly applies to investment in transporting freight.

ESR notes that while it is certainly desirable that interurban passenger rail travel between Tauranga, Hamilton and Auckland be facilitated, a substantial investment in upgrading the rail corridors is likely to be necessary if rail travel times are to be competitive with road travel.

Regions

While a focus on Auckland's transport needs is rational, it should be ensured that other parts of New Zealand with relatively high growth rates and/or a strong tourism potential are given an appropriate level of funding.

Tauranga, for example, has a high population growth rate, increasing traffic delays on major corridors, and a high dependency on car travel. The City is looking to encourage more use of public transport, walking and cycling as part of its strategic planning.

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