

Background information about the citizens' advisory panel for Berhampore and Newtown cycling improvements

Why this section of the cycle route needed a special panel

This section of the route is different: it's very complex, and the large number of possible options means a higher risk of delivering a cycle route that isn't as effective as it should be. This is the first suburban cycle route out of several that we intend to improve, and we wanted to use a process that reflects the wider city's views as well as local views.

The Council did considerable investigative work to see if there was a clear 'best' option which would improve people's cycling experience in these suburbs. It concluded there were many possibilities and potential combinations of routes, lots of different ways these routes could be developed, and compromises – all with their own pros and cons. There were too many options to run a full consultation on.

Nevertheless, the Council needed to know what options to take forward and wanted to get some early community input. Working with a small, well informed group was the best and most cost-effective way to do this and we used a citizens' panel process. This type of panel is a good-practice technique for narrowing down options in complex situations or projects.

The panel has now collectively and independently recommended a smaller number of potential options.

Council staff will take the panel's recommendations into account and develop a cycle route plan for the area, which the public will then get to have a say on. If the routes in it differ significantly from the panel's recommendations, we'll explain why.

The panel's influence

The Citizens' Advisory Panel was assisted by a skilled independent facilitator.

Members were given the greatest possible opportunity to make a measured and well-informed decision, including access to all necessary information.

Citizens' advisory panels like this have not been used by this Council before, and we're looking closely at this process to assess its merits.

Information the panel received

The panel was supported by Council staff so they had all the information and help they needed to:

- be well informed
- get a complete picture of the issues
- give the Council a recommendation that's based on their collective and independent assessment of the different pros and cons.

The panel received:

- summaries of the investigative reports
- summaries of the various route proposals, with pros and cons
- a “101” on essentials – such as cycle-friendly road and urban design, national and local laws and bylaws, international standards for road design
- background information on the presenters who they will hear from
- presentations on the costs, benefits and issues of different options according to various stakeholders

They also visited the areas on foot and by van.

The panel met a total of nine times, mostly for four hours at a time, to receive information and deliberate.

They were paid the standard advisory group honorarium (\$110 per session).

Timeframes

- Late April: panel recruitment
- 12 June: the panel's first meeting
- 14 July: the panel's last meeting
- 28 July: the panel presented its recommendations to Councillors and Council staff.

Council staff will now:

- put the panel's report on the website
- consider the recommendations

- gather more detail on specific aspects
- consult on a cycle route plan.

Transparency

Ward Councillors and the chair of the Transport and Urban Design Committee were able to attend all sessions, and ask and answer questions through the facilitator. Council staff assisting the panel attended all sessions.

The public could attend the presentation sessions as observers.

Panel members agreed not to talk to the media about the panel while it was under way and were asked to use their judgment when speaking about the panel out of hours.

Membership

A representative panel

The panel's membership reflected the Wellington City population, with an extra emphasis on particularly affected groups.

Of 18 members selected, one-third (six) were people with particular knowledge of the issues and priorities of the communities that have an interest in the project. These were:

- residents of the southern suburbs (two seats)
- local businesses (two seats)
- people who cycle regularly (one seat)
- users of the Town Belt (one seat).

The other two-thirds (12) were people not directly affected, broadly representative of Wellington in terms of age, gender, income, where they live, and the overall range of attitudes to cycling. Some of the 12 came from the southern suburbs and others from elsewhere in Wellington. Only 16 members of the panel took part in the decision-making as two of the original members had to pull out for personal reasons.

What's the difference between the representative of an interest group and a member of the panel?

The six members in the community of interest seats brought values shared by their respective communities of interest, but the panel process gave all members the opportunity to combine their different values, priorities and areas of expertise, in making a joint recommendation.

Why some panel members were not direct stakeholders

All Wellingtonians potentially have an interest in the Island Bay to City cycle route, as one of the key steps in making Wellington's transport system more cycle-friendly. The benefits of more people cycling are felt throughout the city, and work on different routes affects a range of people. It's important to reflect in the panel the citywide nature of this change in Wellington's transport networks, as well as reflecting those who are directly affected (positively and negatively) by possible changes.

The panel's size and composition was based on good practice standards for this type of panel so it could function effectively.

Members from communities of interest

The six people on the panel chosen by the various communities of interest were:

- residents of the southern suburbs: Clare O'Brien, Willemijn Vermaat
- local business owners: Dan Mikkelsen, Laura Newcombe
- people who cycle: Ron Beernink
- Town Belt users: Ray Tuffin.

Members from the online research panel

The other 12 panel members were recruited from the Council's representative online research panel, which was surveyed to identify route demands, issues and barriers to cycling. They represented a cross-section of Wellington by age, gender, income and attitudes to cycling. They came from around the city (four are from the southern ward), their ages ranged from people in their 20s to people over 60, and they ranged from people who think it would be a good thing for the city if more people cycled to those who think it would be much worse.