

Boulter Consulting
urban and transport planning

Roger Boulter, 281 High Street South, PO Box 89, Carterton 5743
Tel 06 379 8909, mob 021 872 654, email roger@boulter.co.nz
website www.boulter.co.nz

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Rail's been an issue recently. This morning (as I'm writing this), an eyebrow-raising report emerged from the Auckland Transport Alignment Project suggesting the possibility of the CBD-Airport light rail route being made a 'State highway'. Unthinkable? Well passenger rail use, both in Auckland and Wellington, has been growing in recent years, and if it is of strategic importance, then why should it not receive 100% government funding? I'm not



suggesting this – but that someone in official circles has done so surely might indicate 'interesting times' on this issue.

The Wellington regional 'Wairarapa Connection' – it is rare in New Zealand for a commuter rail service to bring people from a rural area into a major urban centre

Having done some work a few years ago with my colleague Don Wignall (Transport Futures Ltd) in this area, I was very pleased we were asked to advise a local Council on how services could be improved. (Don and I previously worked for KiwiRail on evaluation factors, and on the sort of nationwide strategic planning for rail services (based on those factors) which usually only State highways receive). Commuter rail is a Regional Council responsibility, so of course this was our first 'port of call', but there is a lot of experience among those who, in the past, have been involved in making rail services work, both practically and economically, and so we drew on this as well.

From international as well as New Zealand trends, I can see an increasing role for rail being a defining transport planning issue over the coming years. Following growing government support for the Central Auckland Rail Link, the Minister of Transport was recently quoted as saying that a Hamilton-Auckland passenger rail service was also 'going to happen' (sometime). Getting rail up to speed (no pun intended, although literally too) would require a lot of work. It's not only the Kaikoura line which needs serious cash. Track is often in poor condition on other lines through deferred maintenance, requiring speed restrictions and hindering punctuality – whereas roads may receive surface 'renewal' or 'area-wide treatment' from time to time. I sense the government is moving towards seeing serious funding for rail as money well spent – it will be interesting to see the election year debates around this.

In mid-December Carterton District Council approved a Walking and Cycling Strategy, which I had updated from an earlier 2011 strategy (which I had also prepared). The previous month, Masterton District Council's 'Cycling Advisory Group' approved a Masterton Cycling Strategy which I had prepared. Earlier in the year, a South Wairarapa District Council

internal working party approved the District's first Cycling Strategy, again which I had prepared for them. I understand the Masterton and South Wairarapa strategies will be considered by their respective councils, with a view to approval, early in the New Year.

The Wairarapa has a lot of experience of inter-District joint working – for example, it has a combined Resource Management Act District Plan, the first in the country – and not surprisingly there have been suggestions for a Wairarapa-wide approach on cycling issues. This has in particular come from those advocating for (and working towards, in the form of trusts) recreational or tourist trails, in which there has been a lot of interest in recent years. When all three Councils have approved cycling strategies, there will be a foundation of District Council endorsement in principle, on which rural recreational cycle facilities planning can build.

Carterton's strategy, however, also covers walking, which has not received anything like the public and official enthusiasm we've seen regarding cycling – yet surely it is as important, or more so, for example, for economic prosperity ('footfall' past shops), crime prevention ('eyes on the street') or 'place-making'? There are also growing debates over use of footpaths – scooter use (both by children, and elderly people's 'mobility' scooters) has grown strongly in recent years; a petition is before Parliament to legalise footpath cycling by children and some adults; and the strong growth of interest in 'low-powered vehicles' (such as e-bikes, e-scooters and e-skateboards) raises regulatory issue which the NZ Transport Agency is now considering.

Shortly after my previous newsletter New Zealand's two-yearly *2 Walk and Cycle* conference was held. I presented on my forthcoming book *Humanising Urban and Transport Planning*, which has gone through some exploration, expansion, peer reviews and re-shaping, since I first mentioned it two newsletters ago. Now I'm re-working it again, which I hope will lead on to publication during 2017. My presentation and a peer-reviewed paper are on my website's 'News' page, as part of an item on the conference, where I try to add some comments including insights from others (always the best part of any conference, I think!). Leading on from this I have another 'News' page item on some of the debates around footpath use.

Whatever you are doing over the turn of the year, whether professionally or simply kicking up your heels to enjoy a good break, may you feel blessed and may you return to work refreshed and invigorated to do more useful work in the New Year.

With best wishes

Roger



Carterton's Nancy Blackman, who you may remember from a previous newsletter was a longstanding iconic cyclist in our town. Now she rides a mobility scooter. These can legally use footpaths, but many 'low-powered vehicles' (like e-skateboards, etc) cannot, and the NZ Transport Agency has been researching this issue.