

Central City Transformation Plan
Hutt City Council
30 Laings Road
Lower Hutt 5010

4th March 2019

SUBMISSION/FEEDBACK ON LOWER HUTT CENTRAL CITY DRAFT TRANSFORMATION PLAN

Introduction

The Hutt Valley Chamber of Commerce & Industry Incorporated (HVCCI) welcomes this opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Central City Transformation Plan. We appreciate the opportunity to engage with your consulting urban planners and your officers responsible for this project, and to provide feedback from the business community. We consider the plans to be an important part of the ongoing development of our CBD and the ongoing development of a vibrant and diverse business community and local economy.

The HVCCI has long been involved in the development and promotion of our central city area, not only to meet the needs of the business community but also to ensure that all those who engage with our central city have an enjoyable and memorable experience.

The CBD Transformation, in conjunction with the RiverLink project, provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to address and transform this key area of the City and to reposition the central city as a vibrant, pleasant and modern space for residents, business owners, our business's customers and all visitors to the city. It is an opportunity to rewrite the perceptions that many people locally and nationally about our city centre. It is an opportunity to take a completely fresh approach to the area and make the central city a standout place to live and to conduct business. It is an opportunity to completely transform the reputation of the central city into a vibrant, diverse, attractive and supportive place for businesses and business people to live, operate, interact and flourish.

Any transformation of the city centre needs to ensure that the area is also an attractive place for a wide range of businesses. We need an environment that is attractive to private businesses, government agencies, innovative young business, creative businesses, technology based businesses, service businesses and a whole raft of different business types and operating models. We would expect that the fabric of our future business community will change substantially over the timespan that the CBD transformation plan covers and our environment needs to be flexible enough to cater for these changes and the new types of businesses that we can expect to emerge.

The city needs to be attractive to new businesses who not only want to access the central Lower Hutt market and community but also the wide Lower Hutt community, Wellington City and

Wellington region. Excellent transport links into Wellington city as well as other places in the region is crucial. For example with improved access to rail, roading infrastructure and cycling central Lower Hutt could easily become an attractive satellite business community for the Wellington CBD.

The Hutt Valley Chamber of Commerce was delighted to host, in conjunction with the Hutt City Council, a workshop recently to engage the business community in the draft plans and to provide feedback and suggestions. Although much of the feedback was captured at the event the following summarises some of the key recommendations and feedback.

Feedback on Draft Central City Transformation Plan

1. The HVCCI endorses the recommendation to consolidate the CBD into a more tightly defined area which is less “strung out” than the current configuration. The current configuration of two competing main streets makes it difficult to create a hub atmosphere for the CBD, plus CBD sections of Queens Drive and High Street currently tend to peter out into poor quality premises of which many are empty. By giving the centre a tighter configuration it will be easier to create the dynamic atmosphere desired.
2. Re-orientating the city centre towards the river is a key opportunity to take advantage of one of our most iconic, unique natural assets. The river has always been the hub of the development of the entire valley and as such it also presents many challenges. However, it is the core of our valley and with better care and management it can be a more valuable asset, providing our communities with a connection to our heritage, recreation and our beautiful natural resources. Re-pivoting the city towards the river will incorporate the river into our CBD and is a unique opportunity for Lower Hutt. It will also connect more of our community with the river and this can be used to ensure improved environmental care and management.
3. The HVCCI supports the provision of additional residential options within the CBD. Any transformation needs to include creating an attractive and enjoyable living experience for young people, older people, families and business people. A range of residential options is required and with an inner city population there will be increase demand for new types of businesses.
4. There is support for the west side of the river to be incorporated in to the CBD more. However the current plan only suggests minimal development .The suggestion is that additional apartments and business sites should be included on the west side of the river to ensure better flow and integration.
5. The Chamber supports the recommendations for pedestrian bridges across the river to provide improved non-road linkages with the CBD. It is necessary that these bridges are made “all weather” to ensure regular use and a pleasant and enjoyable user experience. They will be used not only for commuters from Melling Station but also for short walks by those working the area and residents getting to and from work locations. The protection of users of the bridge from frequent inclement weather is essential to ensure maximum acceptance and use of the bridge connections.
6. The HVCCI also recommends that these bridges are made iconic features of Lower Hutt. They need to provide strong sense of arrival for all users and a unique welcome. They will enhance the experience of the river and will be an important part of giving Lower Hutt a fresh identity.
7. Building iconic bridges that are worthy of photographing would be a useful tool in marketing Lower Hutt as a destination. If the bridges are interesting and unique people will

take photos of themselves and share on social media. Iconic bridges create various opportunities for the promotion and marketing of the city. Other locations internationally use this marketing strategy to build market awareness and engagement with their stakeholders. They will be an important part of building the national and international identity of the city.

8. The HVCCI recognises that there is unrealised potential for the City as a tourism destination. Although tourists may be initially attracted to the city for other services such as cycle ways, sports centres, nature reserves, heritage etc the development of the CBD needs to support this by providing a modern, attractive and enjoyable hub for national and international tourists.
9. The southern end of the CBD (site where the Sofitel is being developed) should be retained as a green garden space linking Riddiford Gardens to the river esplanade. This could work well for the new Hotel and provide people with a continuous flow of gardens to walk through and enjoy. An overbridge continuing with the garden theme could be used across the end of Queens Drive / Laings Road to encourage walking flow.
10. The central city shopping area should include some more green space, in an enclosed area suitable for young families to spend time outside in a safe environment. Limiting the green space to just the river bank creates a hard line between the built area and the river area. An enclosed garden space would be useful for containing children playing and provide a comfortable outdoor space for those businesses who are not within close walking distance of Riddiford garden or the riverbank. This would be attractive for employees working in the central city
11. Vehicle parking remains a very real concern for employers, employees and business customers. Many currently use the riverbank carpark and many chamber members express concern around loss of parking. Additional parking need to be provided.
12. Walking routes around the CBD would be useful for employees to enjoy the outdoors during their work breaks. A selection of short walks would encourage movement of people at key times and facilitate them engaging with business. It is also supportive of a healthy working environment. Making it attractive and easy for people to walk in the CBD is an important part of creating an effective and energetic central business community. These should be incorporated into the plan.
13. As the development considers more medium density housing special consideration should be made for dogs in the central city, with areas for exercise and walking.
14. The CBD development also needs to ensure linkages with the cycle and walkways also available across the city. For example cycleways in the CBD need to link to the river trail, the beltway etc. These will be useful for local residence for recreation as well and workers as an easier commuting option.

In relation to the Riverlink project the HVCCI sees the repositioning of the Melling Railway Station to a location adjacent to the Hutt City CBD as a positive move. Bringing it completely into the centre of the city is one idea that some members have suggested. Any improvements to the location and accessibility of Melling Station will provide a much improved public transport link to the Hutt City shopping area, the business precinct and will provide additional transport options for existing Hutt City CBD area residents. In addition the railway network is an important part of linking the Hutt CBD with Wellington city CBD as well as the airport.

A special mention re Transport Infrastructure

Transport infrastructure is currently one of the biggest barriers to business confidence in the Hutt Valley. There is increasing congestion around the CBD especially at peak times. Access to both Melling and Ewen bridges is increasingly difficult and slow. The HVCCI would like to reinforce the need for careful planning around traffic flows in the CBD regardless of the changes to SH2 and the Riverlink project. Any changes need to consider not only the traffic flow once it reaches SH2 but also the flow of traffic through the CBD whether it is heading to SH2 or simply trying to access both eastern and western parts of the valley.

Conclusion

The HVCCI is keen to see progress in the transformation of Lower Hutt's CBD and looks forward to working with the Hutt City Council. Our members are enthusiastic for changes and would like to see progress on the plans sooner rather than later. We look forward to further engaging the business community in the finalization of the plans and their implementation.

Yours sincerely

Helen Down
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