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HILL STREET, WEST HOBART IMPROVED PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Hill Street, West Hobart improved Pedestrian Crossings Project.

Victoria Walks congratulates the City of Hobart for undertaking this project to improve the walkability of West Hobart, and for seeking to address the concerns of the community of West Hobart.

Victoria Walks is supportive of most of the proposed changes. We also suggests the City considers other changes and actions to improve the walkability of West Hobart to make it safer and more appealing for walking and increase the number of local walking trips over the long term.

Victoria Walks will provide comments from the perspective of walking promotion and walkable urban design for the City to consider, however it is important to note that Victoria Walks staff do not have formal engineering, road safety or street design qualifications. Furthermore, while Victoria Walks is providing comments, it recognises that any allocation of funds by the City of Hobart will likely compete with other transport infrastructure projects across the city. Victoria Walks recommends all municipalities across Australia significantly increase funding of pedestrian specific projects.

Our comments focus particularly on the need to provide walking infrastructure on all streets in order to facilitate walking, particularly by the most vulnerable members of the community. Victoria Walks believes that improvements should centre on both making the area safer for walking and increasing the number of overall walking trips. That is, improvements should be undertaken along the corridor and ideally on an area wide approach.

Victoria Walks is an evidence-based organisation and from time to time we undertake or commission our own research (see www.victoriawalks.org.au/research). Our research projects that are relevant to the Hill Street Project are:

- *Safer Road Design For Older Pedestrians*
- *Fall-Related Injuries While Walking In Victoria*
- *Senior Victorians and Walking: Obstacles and Opportunities.*

Background – Victoria Walks

Victoria Walks is a walking health promotion body working to get more Victorians walking every day. Our vision is for vibrant, supportive and strong neighbourhoods and communities where people can and do choose to walk wherever possible.

Our cities, towns, neighbourhoods and urban areas have become largely automobile dependent and less walkable. This has contributed to the emergence of more sedentary lifestyles in which Victorians do not engage in the recommended levels of physical activity. Physical inactivity is a significant factor in the dramatic rise in the levels of obesity and preventable diseases such as Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Walking-friendly neighbourhoods and urban spaces are essential to encourage and enable people to walk. Walking is associated with positive health outcomes, improved fitness and better physical, social and mental health. Making towns, cities and suburbs more walkable has many health, environmental and economic benefits.

General comments

Victoria Walks strongly recommends that road managers and transport planners ensure pedestrian infrastructure and amenity meets the needs of those who can be described as the 'walking dependent', who are people who are dependent upon walking or others to get around, lead their daily lives and participate in their community. The 'walking dependent' includes children, many seniors and those with a vision impairment or other disability.

Our *Safer Road Design For Older Pedestrians* report outlines a number of principles of better design for older pedestrian safety that are also relevant to other pedestrians, especially children and pedestrians with a disability. These principles are:

1. Separation from traffic. Older people need a comprehensive, connected footpath network to allow them to walk comfortably without mixing with traffic when they are not actively crossing a road.
2. Reduction in vehicle speeds. This can apply generally, through area wide traffic calming or speed limits, and specifically at crossing points.
3. Reduction in the complexity of crossing the road. This includes design that allows older people to stage crossings and deal with one direction of traffic at a time, and signal phasing that avoids conflict with turning traffic.
4. Reduction in crossing distance. Design should minimise the distance that pedestrians have to cross while exposed to traffic.
5. More time to cross. Signalised pedestrian crossings need to provide adequate phase time to allow older pedestrians walking at slower speeds to complete their crossing.
6. Increase visibility of pedestrians. Treatments such as kerb outstands and pedestrian refuges, and signal phasing such as 'head start,' allow pedestrians to safely position themselves where they are visible to drivers.
7. Reinforce the requirement for vehicles to give way. Treatments such as raised thresholds and crossings, and visible extension of footpaths over driveways, reinforce the legal requirement for vehicles to give way when turning.
8. Quality surfaces and detailed design. It is important that footpaths provide level, smooth (but non-slip) surfaces and minimal obstructions, and changes in level at the kerb are minimised, to reduce the risk of falling.

In general, the proposed improvements in the Hill Street area partially meet, or are heading in the direction of, many of the principles. However, there are some further improvements that Victoria Walks believes should be considered and ideally scheduled for implementation.

Victoria Walks considers that both formal (pedestrian crossings) and informal crossing points (e.g. refuges) be installed in the area – informal crossings points are a very important component to increasing walkability however, they are unlikely to meet the needs of the most vulnerable walkers in all areas so formal crossing points are needed.

Improvements, such as the installation of formal and informal crossing points, should be undertaken on current and expected pedestrian movements and desire lines. For instance, pedestrian refuges or crossings should not be installed mid-block (or set back) if walkers currently, or are likely to, cross at intersections.

Victoria Walks believes that, according to various consultant and community lead pedestrian counts, there are a reasonable number of people walking for transport and/or recreation in West Hobart to justify investment in pedestrian infrastructure. However, Victoria Walks cautions against relying solely on pedestrian counts to assess whether pedestrian infrastructure is needed. With the installation of the right sort of social and physical infrastructure, the number of walkers in relatively dense urban areas, such as West Hobart, can be expected to increase significantly. After all, bridges across rivers are not built based on the need determined by the number of people who currently swim across the river.

Speed and lane width

Victoria Walks is supportive of the plans to reduce traffic lane widths and install central medians in some locations, including pedestrian refuges. This will assist in meeting design Principles 3, 4 and 6 above. However, Victoria Walks considers the proposed 4 metre wide lanes to be significantly wider than they need be and are extremely unlikely to result in a reduction of vehicle speed, which should be a key component of any works undertaken (Principal 2).

The street needs to be designed as a street, not a road, and with a vehicle design speed of 40 kmh. Subsequently, lane width should be no more than 3.5 meters and possibly as narrow as 3.1 metres. In Melbourne, VicRoads and councils are increasingly lowering speeds to 40kmh on streets through local activity centres.

Consideration should also be given for planting appropriate species of trees at intervals along the central median (as occurs elsewhere along Hill St) to improve local amenity, further lower speeds, provide shade and reduce the heat island effect, all of which will improve the walking environment.

Roundabouts in residential areas

Roundabouts are problematic for pedestrians because drivers do not need to give way to pedestrians in any circumstance. This also contradicts and therefore potentially confuses the rules for other intersections. At roundabouts drivers tend to focus on avoiding conflict with other cars and ignore other road users. In a study of pedestrians in Western Australia, 72% found it harder to cross at a roundabout than a conventional crossing (Browning 2001, cited in [Evaluation of an alternative treatment at a roundabout](#)).

In recognition that roundabouts can be difficult to navigate for pedestrians, the standard engineering response is to provide marked pedestrian crossings set back from the actual roundabout. Because the crossings are not on pedestrian desire lines fewer people will use them and they may be deterred from walking altogether. Pedestrian issues with roundabouts are also discussed in the VicRoads traffic management note [Roundabouts and Traffic Signals Guidelines for the Selection of Intersection Control](#).

Victoria Walks believes councils wishing to promote walking should generally avoid building roundabouts, a policy informally adopted by some Melbourne inner suburban

councils. Alternatively, roundabouts can be constructed with raised pedestrian crossings on pedestrian desire lines as developed by [Port Phillip City Council](#).

West Hobart roundabouts

As there are no proposed improvements around the Hill St roundabouts (particularly at: Hill Street, Lansdowne Cres and Pine Street; and Hill Street, Lansdowne Cres and Patrick Street) there are no apparent significant pedestrian safety benefits that will result in increased walking trips.

Unlike the proposed refuges at conventional intersections below, turning vehicles at the roundabout do not have to give way to pedestrians. The proposed designs do not address the issue of pedestrian safety and amenity.

Furthermore, it is not realistic to expect that pedestrians walking along Lansdowne Cres crossing Hill St and continuing along Pine St will detour the 100 metres or to the proposed pedestrian refuge on Hills St.

Victoria Walks believes that supportive pedestrian infrastructure in the form of formal pedestrian crossings, combined with lowering vehicle speed through design, particularly on approach to the roundabouts, is necessary to improve pedestrian safety. Ideally, raised pedestrian crossings similar to those of the City of Port Phillip should be installed.

Pedestrian refuges

Victoria Walks supports the installation of pedestrian refuges, but believes that the width on all the proposed pedestrian refuges needs be widened from the current minimum 1.2 metres so, for example, two prams crossing at the same time from opposite directions may comfortably meet in the middle. Consideration should be given to designing all refuges to be the width of a pedestrian crossing, including raising to the height of the existing footpath so that if, over time, any are assessed as worthy of a pedestrian crossing then all that need occur is the lines be painted and signage installed.

Arthur and Hill St

Consideration should be given to relocating the current pedestrian refuge that is set back from Arthur St on Hill St to the corner of Arthur and Hill so that walkers traveling along Arthur St and crossing Hill have supportive infrastructure along their walking desire line. Note: under Road Rules drivers must give way to pedestrians on the road onto which they are turning (except at roundabouts) and the current refuge positioning does not support this occurring.

Hill and Hamilton

The proposed refuge on Hills St near Hamilton is a good addition, it includes a kerb extension and is on the corner nearly in line with the Hamilton St footpath. Victoria Walks is unable to ascertain whether the refuge should be northern side of Hamilton (as drawn) or the southern corner, the placement should be determined by pedestrian movements (i.e. on the side with the greater movements).

Hill and Petty

As in the Hill and Hamilton refuge, this is a good addition and similarly positioning should be determined by the greater pedestrian movements.

Hill and Alison

Victoria Walks is unclear why the proposed pedestrian refuge on Hill St is set back a little from Alison St and believes it should be positioned in line with the Alison St footpath. Note: drivers entering Hill from Alison are required to give way to pedestrian crossing Hill and moving the refuge would reinforce this legal requirement.

Faraday and Hill

As in the Hill and Hamilton refuge, this is a good addition and similarly positioning should be determined by the greater pedestrian movements.

Hill and Brisbane

The kerb on the northern corner of Brisbane and Hill should be straightened. As it currently is, it invites drivers coming from the north and turning into Brisbane to do so at speed. This undermines the driver requirement of give way to pedestrians crossing on Brisbane St.

Community activation

Importantly, the City of Hobart should encourage and support the local community to develop community activation projects to foster social connections, community building and increase the number of local walking trips, including to and from school, shops and community services.

Other

Victoria Walks believes much greater attention should be given to pedestrian supportive infrastructure, particularly along and to the main walking routes, such as street seating, tree canopy shade and commencing a process of installing raised thresholds across side streets at intersections to the height of the adjacent footpaths.