

# Walking Infrastructure Tour, Melbourne March 2017

## Observations and recommendations

Alderman Anna Reynolds

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The walking tour of Melbourne hosted by Victoria Walks emerged out of discussions around the design of pedestrian crossing improvements in West Hobart.

A community campaign for pedestrian priority crossings on Hill Street has been running for many years led by school principals, businesses and pedestrian advocates in the area. The motivation behind the Melbourne tour was to inspect examples of best practice pedestrian priority infrastructure that both meets national safety standards and creates a more walkable community.

Because this was the genesis of the walking tour, I have decided to focus this report of my learning's from the tour on finding a good outcome for West Hobart pedestrians.

I hope to see Council spend its scarce resources in the most effective way, meet community expectations for their streets and move towards best practice – it is futile to spend money on pedestrian infrastructure in Hill Street that will not be used and has a limited impact on creating a more walking friendly environment.

A key learning from the tour was the City of Port Philip which has a policy to retrofit all roundabouts with raised zebra crossings - these are also known as 'wombat' crossings. They use the Victorian Warrant (guidelines) as the basis for the installing the crossings. These are the same guidelines that the Department of State Growth has approved Hobart City using to make decisions about where to install pedestrian crossings. The warrant is met when there are 20 pedestrians (or 10 elderly people / school children) crossing at an intersection an hour (for at least 1 – 2 hours).

The Australian Road Research Board and Austroads have also identified wombat crossings as a very safe option for pedestrians finding that, *"raised pedestrian or 'wombat' crossings have also shown great promise"* and that they can be used on busy roads,

*"to create a lower speed environment along a route or specific locations where there are higher risks (eg. the presence of vulnerable road users at shopping precincts). The design profile of the ramps and height of the platform can be altered to provide design speeds appropriate to the road environment"* (Turner, Jurewicz & Makwasha, ARRB 2016).

### Recommendations from the walking tour

- Install two wombat (raised zebra) crossings roundabout treatments at the main shopping precinct intersections in Hill Street - Intersections of Hill, Lansdowne & Pine Sts, and Hill, Lansdowne & Patrick Sts.
- Provide wombat (raised zebra) crossings on Macquarie Street and Augusta Road as part of pedestrian improvements in those streets.

### Lessons from Melbourne for the West Hobart improving pedestrian amenity project

#### Background

A Council decision was made in June 2016 to spend \$300,000 to make Hill Street better for pedestrians.

The West Hobart community have been advocating for safer crossings in Hill Street for many years, but the recent efforts since 2013 have involved at least 15 different official letters being sent to Council by school principals, aged care home providers and businesses over that period. The community have also organised numerous site visits, attended multiple meetings with Council, organised community petitions, undertaken research and pedestrian counts, written emails and had many conversations.

This huge amount of effort has been for a fairly simple request – the community want pedestrian priority zebra / wombat crossings at two key intersections, which are the main hubs of community / commercial activity and on the most active walking routes in West Hobart.

The reason for this request is because Hill Street is a busy local collector street that has 1300 - 1400 cars an hour during the morning and afternoon peaks and a total of more than 6,700 cars per day. The street has three roundabouts and the constant flow of cars creates very few gaps in the traffic to allow a safe crossing environment, particularly for school children and the elderly.

### **A solution for West Hobart identified on the Melbourne walking tour**

The raised pedestrian (wombat) crossing roundabout treatment used throughout the City of Port Philip is the ideal treatment for Hill Street at two locations:

- Intersection of Hill, Lansdowne and Pine Streets – with Smolt Cafe, the local chemist, closest intersection to the Primary School and close to the main bus stop into town.
- Intersection of Hill, Lansdowne and Patrick Streets – with local shop, post office, cafe, shops, and major school bus stop for local high schools and city buses.

The following 4 photos illustrate the use of a raised zebra (wombat) crossing roundabout treatment in numerous locations around the City of Port Philip. This treatment is used in quiet streets and on major collector roads. The City of Port Philip has a policy to retrofit all roundabouts in order to improve safety and more walking friendly streets.

The City uses the Victorian Warrant (guidelines) as the basis for the provision of the crossings on roundabouts: a requirement of 20 pedestrians (or 10 elderly people / school children) an hour crossing at an intersection during one peak hour. Each retrofitted roundabout has a gently raised zebra crossing on each of the four approaches.



Photos from top left – School children walking home in Albert Park, Albert Park shops, residential street in Elwood, South Melbourne shops

While the City of Port Philip pioneered this roundabout zebra crossing treatment it can also be seen in other cities including Fremantle, Bayside (VIC) and Northern Beaches (NSW).

## **The tour helped to debunk some of the arguments that have been raised against installing raised zebra (wombat) crossings on roundabouts in Hill Street....**

### **Claim 1. West Hobart has low population density and there just aren't enough people to make good pedestrian infrastructure worth it**

West Hobart has a population of 5800 people ([2011 Census](#)) and covers about 270 hectares, making the population density about 21.5 persons per hectare. The area of Albert Park that we visited in the City of Port Philip with such fabulous pedestrian infrastructure has a population density of 25 persons per hectare, ([a 2015 figure](#)). Factoring in the 4 year difference in data, there is a relatively small difference in the density of these 2 areas. Certainly not enough of a difference to argue that one has more density to justify quality pedestrian infrastructure than another.

### **Claim 2. West Hobart people don't walk as much as people in Melbourne do**

Comparing City of Port Philip (with the raised zebra crossing roundabouts) with City of Hobart, the 2011 census data indicates quite a different picture from the myth.

In Port Philip 66.1% of residents use private vehicles to travel to work. 26.3% of residents use buses, trains or trams to get to work. Just **11.4%** use active transport (walking or cycling) to work.

[http://www.portphilip.vic.gov.au/print\\_community\\_pulse\\_latest\\_information.htm](http://www.portphilip.vic.gov.au/print_community_pulse_latest_information.htm)

While the Greater Hobart area has 10% of people walking to work, the Hobart Transport Strategy Background paper extracted the 2011 Census figures for the Hobart City Council area and found that **25%** of residents that live and work in the HCC area walk to work! (see page 74 of the [Private Transport Paper](#))

Hobart has one of the highest proportional uses of walking as a means of transport among all Australian capital cities, and certainly a higher proportion of walkers than City of Port Philip with its fabulous pedestrian infrastructure.

### **Claim 3. There are not enough pedestrians in Hill Street to meet the Victorian pedestrian crossing warrants or to justify a 'City of Port Philip' style roundabout crossing treatment**

Council has not collected a lot of pedestrian data in West Hobart. However we do have some data that was captured in 2016 by MRCagney consultants, a parent's group and the West Hobart Environment Network. This data shows that one of the key intersections in Hill Street well and truly meets all the requirements necessary for a zebra crossing as per the Victorian Warrants (of 20 pedestrians per hour for 1 hour per day).

#### **Hill, Patrick, Lansdowne streets intersection**

##### **1.WH Enviro Network count**

60 pedestrians (8 – 9am)

47 pedestrians (2.30 – 3.30pm)

##### **2.MRCagney count**

82 – AM Peak

26 – PM Peak

##### **3.August Count (Lansdowne parents)**

73 (children) - 8-9am

57 (children) – 3-4pm

A very recent parent association led count conducted between 8 and 9am at 3 locations found 117 people crossing Hill Street at the Post Office corner and 83 crossing Hill Street at the Smolt corner. Similar numbers are found in Hill Street between 3 – 6pm in the school and work end peaks. This meets the Warrants that the Department of State Growth have said Council can use in determining the location of pedestrian crossings.

Hill Street also meets the other requirements to meet the Victorian Warrants of being a local collector road of only 1 lane of traffic each way and 50 km/h or less. The Department of State Growth confirmed in correspondence to the Hobart City Council that the Victorian Warrants can be used to decide if zebra crossings should be installed.

**Claim 4. Council can't install raised threshold crossings on a street like Hill Street**

The raised crossings that are used on busy roads in the City of Port Philip do not use speed bump or old-style crossing ramp grades, but much easier grades of 1 in 20 – 25. These grades create a more comfortable journey, have been accepted as bus and truck friendly in the City of Port Philip.

The 2016 Austroads guide *“Achieving Safe System Speeds on Urban Arterial Roads: Compendium of Good Practice”* lists wombat crossings as a potential treatment “with more gradual ramps and longer flat sections recommended on bus and bicycle routes”. This style of raised crossing would be suitable for Hill Street.

There is a need to get approval of the Department of State Growth for this treatment but given the increasing use of this around Australia and the grades not as severe as traditional speed humps, approval may be forthcoming.

**Claim 5. Hill Street is hilly and this would create problems for wombat crossings**

The community's preferred locations for Council's investment in enhanced pedestrian crossings are the two intersections at the top of the valley. This is where there is a level walking environment and intersection with the second major neighbourhood road (Lansdowne Crescent).

These intersections are also where the pedestrians already are, community and commercial infrastructure, bus stops and good desire lines. While there is a deep valley between these locations, the approaches on all sides of the roundabouts provide good visibility of the intersection at a distance of 50 – 60 metres.

**SUMMARY - Best practice design for Hobart pedestrians – ensuring ratepayers funds are well spent, placing infrastructure where it will be used**

A principal that drives the design of pedestrian infrastructure in the places we visited is that crossing infrastructure is provided at the locations where people already want to cross. These are the key desire lines and major routes for pedestrians, in the vicinity of shops, the major routes for the suburb and at the key intersections of the street.

National and international walking advocates and road experts recognise the benefits of raised zebra (wombat) crossings, particularly for the elderly and children. They alone offer legal priority for pedestrians and the clearly marked stripes and warning signs make the crossing locations obvious.

These pedestrian priority crossings are best placed at intersections where vehicle speeds are being reduced anyway, rather than at mid-block locations where vehicle speeds are generally at their highest.

Raised crossing points, make pedestrians more conspicuous to drivers, and also to make the crossing point level with the footpath so the pedestrian does not have to look to see where their feet are but can instead focus on the traffic. Victoria Walks provides ample guidance for best practice [http://www.victoriawalks.org.au/Safer\\_Road\\_Design/](http://www.victoriawalks.org.au/Safer_Road_Design/)

In 2016 the Australian Road Research Board reported on a review of international literature and a before/after evaluation of 14 wombat crossings on higher traffic volume roads across Victoria and identified a 45% reduction in vehicle-pedestrian crashes.<sup>1</sup>

We need to ensure that the investment in West Hobart pedestrian infrastructure is focused at the places where there is most community activity and at the desirable crossing points for pedestrians. The major intersections in Hill Street already have some parking limits around them, and will see less disruption from the installation of crossing infrastructure. Our investment also needs to be at the flat areas on the top of the valley as these are on the easiest routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

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<sup>1</sup> What works when providing safe road infrastructure? 10 treatments that 1 need to be used more. Blair Turnera, Chris Jurewicza, Tariro Makwashaa, Australian Road Research Board, 2016 (Abstract only) <http://acrs.org.au/files/papers/arsc/2016/Turner%2000043%20PR.pdf>