



2025

Featherston Street Upgrade



The Greasy Chain Charitable Trust

5/3/2025

Featherston Street Upgrade – Submission to Palmerston North City Council 5th March 2025

New Zealanders support improved safe pedestrian and cycle options

According to data from New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA)¹, a significant majority of urban New Zealanders support improved cycling infrastructure, with over 60% viewing cycling as a great way to get around, and most believing investment in dedicated cycling facilities is important for both transport and exercise purposes.

However, concerns around safety and traffic remain major barriers to increased cycling usage, highlighting the need for better segregated cycle paths and traffic calming measures to encourage more people to cycle regularly.

Similarly, nearly 7 in 10 (69%) urban New Zealanders see walking as a great way to get around town quickly and easily. However, barriers to walking remain consistent over time and centre around safety, ease and access, and logistics.

According to the Waka Kotahi survey of April 2023:

- **The largest motivators to walk** are personal factors, such as providing fitness, enjoyment and ‘me time’. Saving money is also an important motivator which has significantly increased since 2021.
- Despite some softening over time, **overall support for cycling remains high** with over two-thirds (68%) supporting cycling in their communities.
- While most urban New Zealanders can ride a bicycle (81%), **ownership and access of bikes remains low** with half unable to access a bicycle (50%).
- **The largest barriers to cycling** continue to centre around safety and logistics. The most prominent barrier is not feeling safe because of how people drive.
- **Overall safety perceptions for cycling have declined** 4% since 2021, with half of urban New Zealanders (51%) perceiving cycling as safe. However, this remains significantly greater than pre-Covid levels in 2019.

This submission focusses on the benefits and uptake of cycling infrastructure on Featherston Street.

In addition to obtaining feedback (both positive and negative) from all street users on the upgrade of Featherston Street, it's worth looking at the international evidence in relation to segregated cycleways.

Experience from both here and elsewhere, shows there are generally three negative views when it comes to building separated cycleways.

¹ April 2023 - Understanding attitudes and perceptions of cycling & walking. WAKA KOTAHI

1. Perceived safety concerns of people who may want to cycle.

One often hears the comment, “Why should we provide cycle lanes for people as they are rarely used”.

This may seem strange, as surely building safer cycleways will encourage people to cycle? And to an extent they do. However, because of pre-conceived ideas about cycling being unsafe in our city, people are still reticent to use the new cycleways.

How will they get there? *“I have to travel across town, and whilst it would suit me to use Featherston Street as part of my commute, I will be on unsafe roads until I get there”.*

By contrast, the He Ara Kotahi bridge, constructed in 2019 (which connects the shared riverbank pathway with access to/from Linton) saw over 12,300 cycle crossings on the new bridge across the Manawatu River in January 2025, and over 41,000 pedestrian crossings. For the year 2024, more than 500,000 crossing were made, proving the mantra that “Build it & they will come!”, which leads to the next point - connected cycleways - “Build it fully & they will come!”.

2. Lack of connected cycleways

If 60% of New Zealanders think that “cycling is a good way to get around”, why aren’t 60% of us using the existing cycleways?

People will only use a cycleway when it takes them on their journey from point A to their final destination at Point B. At the moment, Featherston Street is one short strip of very well built separated cycleways.

For Featherston Street to be used extensively as is the He Ara Kotahi bridge, the upgrade needs to be extended to the full length of Featherston Street to enable people to get to their final destination.

3. The perceived negative impact on business

An analysis of more than a dozen studies looking at the impact of improved cycling and pedestrian infrastructure on business shows a largely positive impact on earnings.

For example, A review by the University of California² looked at 23 different studies of the impact cycling and pedestrian infrastructure had on business, with most finding positive impacts on both earnings and employment.

In some cases, there was no impact on business, but in the majority of cases from more than three dozen cities, earnings increased after the introduction of cycling lanes and removal of street parking.

With the current economic downturn across the country at the moment, it would be difficult to assess and isolate any negative impact on Featherston Street businesses of the recent street upgrade. However, it would be wise to obtain anecdotal feedback from all Featherston Street businesses on their impressions of the impact and to ask what changes they have made in their marketing to highlight and attract more customers who may wish to walk or cycle to their business. In light of the extensive research highlighting the business benefits of cycleways, it

² Volker, J. M. B., & Handy, S. (2021). Economic impacts on local businesses of investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure: a review of the evidence. *Transport Reviews*, 41(4), 401–431. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01441647.2021.1912849>

would seem like a golden opportunity to use the upgrade as a business advantage that other businesses may not have.

Support for Featherston Street Upgrade

The Trust is not privy to early usage statistics and in light of the preceding evidence, they would seem somewhat immaterial at this stage. True usage will only be known when the full length of Featherston Street is completed. However, we do have feedback from a number of residents who've expressed their thanks to the Council for the current work. Some samples follow:

I have loved the riverside/He Ara Kotahi path and many of the other new delineated cycleways that have been developed over the years across our city, some of which, I have ridden hundreds of times. Thank you for providing this to our city's inhabitants. The path is often very busy with people, especially in summer, which makes me very happy to see.

I use the Featherston St/Rangitikei St intersection occasionally, either as a motorist or, more frequently, as a cyclist and I know it has made a big difference to cyclist safety, especially near PN Boys High School.

This re-engineered stretch of road is a wonderful step in the right direction, despite some negative press, primarily from motorists and businesses. I genuinely feel safer when cycling there, and any inconvenience to motorists appears to be minimal. I am so grateful the city was able to get this completed. I really hope it's a sign of things to come.

Jen, Radiation Therapist

I use the Featherston Street and the Featherston St/Rangitikei St intersection on a daily basis, sometimes as a motorist, sometimes as a cyclist and sometimes as a pedestrian.

I would like to use it and other streets as a cyclist a little more often but don't feel totally confident to do so. The stretch of road along Featherston Street that the Council have re-engineered is a great step in the right direction. It feels safer when cycling and any inconvenience to motorists appears minimal. Is it the answer? Not completely, it still needs to be more connected to other thoroughfares and there are some issues with the traffic lights at the intersection but it is a great start.

John, local resident

So, the first thing I'd like to say thank you for is all the effort the council has put into bike paths. I know these have been controversial, but I think you are doing a wonderful job. Since we moved here in 2017 I have biked to work pretty much every single day (even when I was pregnant and worked up to 38 weeks). I have ridden up and down Featherston St to the hospital and now to Kauri HealthCare from Awapuni as well as all around Palmerston North. In fact, I purchased a cargo bike in November 2022 and have ridden nearly 9000km with my 2 children (they sit on the back) just around Palmerston North. That's a lot of kilometres that we haven't had to use the car for which is just fantastic!

Featherston St was an absolute crazy place to ride until the new upgrade. It has made it so much safer for bikes, cars and pedestrians. I was always worried about cars dropping off their kids and pulling out of parks at the schools - it was hectic. Now it is so much more pleasant. Thank you so very, very,

much! I'm hoping that it will motivate more people to get out of their cars and walking/biking around. Everyday I see the issues with people living a sedentary lifestyle and I feel sad to see the norm for how so many children get to school. When I was young it was standard to walk or bike and happily, I've kept this going now in my adult life no matter what the weather.

Zoe, local GP

Since moving to Palmerston North, I've personally been inspired by these changes. The development of cycle and pedestrian-friendly streets has encouraged me to start cycling every week and walking daily—something I hadn't done as regularly while living in India. The inviting nature of the streets here, coupled with the clear dedication to making active transport safer and more accessible, has made these habits part of my everyday routine. I can see firsthand how these small changes in infrastructure lead to a healthier, more vibrant lifestyle, not just for myself but for many in our community.

Before I moved to Palmerston North, I saw similar efforts beginning to emerge in India, particularly in New Delhi. For instance, Connaught Place, a bustling area in the heart of the city, has been redeveloped with cycle lanes and pedestrian zones. The initiative there, while still growing, has made a significant impact, encouraging more people to use bicycles or walk, leading to a reduction in car use, improved air quality, and a more active and connected community. Seeing Palmerston North's strides in this direction has been equally, if not more, inspiring.

Gaurav, new resident

Just wanted to share my very positive experience from last weekend visiting friends in Palmerston North.

I have lived in the Manawatū, Feilding and later Palmerston North on Featherston street for 16 years. Coming from the Netherlands I brought my bike and assumed I was going to use that as my main form of transport. Very quickly I gave that idea a pass after experiencing the total lack of cycling infrastructure. Over the years the council showed it was aware of that total lack of cycling infrastructure - the green paint came out for cycling lanes and (shared) pathways were built. A slow process over the years I was around.

Now my last weekend experience. It seems PN has taken up a fast-track ticket into the world of cycling infrastructure as it can be seen in for example in the Netherlands. When I drove along my old house at Featherston Street, passed PNBHS, Rangitikei intersection and Central Normal School I was amazed and impressed at the same time with the newly created road lay-out. I only sold up two years ago and bang - suddenly PNCC creates the blueprint for how it is done. Chapeau!

I sincerely hope the council will have the courage to keep this momentum going regardless of the small group of nay sayers. This piece of Featherston Street helps in creating a sustainable Palmerston North City and makes it more livable or should I say 'lovable' - actually both are correct.

Matt, former Featherston Street resident

Moving Forward ...

Spending on cycle lanes is fantastic value for money. However, whenever spending on transport infrastructure is mentioned, figures out of context can sound huge - until one compares how much different infrastructure costs.

More importantly, is the value of return from that investment. The average 'Benefit Cost Ratio' (BCR) for walking and cycling projects is an incredible 13:1, which means that for every dollar spent on walking and cycling infrastructure, \$13 is returned to the economy³.

When road space is set aside for cycle lanes, as we've pointed out, we sometimes hear complaints that cyclists aren't using them, or that they're only using them at certain times of the day. The photos posted on social media purporting to show cycle lanes without any cyclists aren't usually a helpful indicator of their overall use. As just one example of many, the city of Seville in Spain increased people cycling by a rate of 10 times over four years after they developed a series of interconnected cycleways throughout the city⁴.

Finally, we've not mentioned the benefits cycling brings to the environment and health - these are a given!

Nor have we mentioned safety for children attending Central Normal and Boys High schools. Increased safety for all road users of Featherston Street where previously there had been 207 accidents and two fatalities over a 10-year period, was (and still must be) a key driver of the Featherston Street upgrade.

It's for these reasons that the Greasy Chain Charitable Trust congratulates and fully supports the Palmerston North City Council's ongoing project to make Featherston Street beneficial to the entire community.

Bob Selden

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Helping all New Zealanders become fitter through cycling.

³ University of Canterbury - 24 May 2022- Don't believe the backlash – the benefits of NZ investing more in cycling will far outweigh the costs.

⁴ Forum Vies Mobiles - 21 Nov 2022 - Cycling policies: Lessons from Seville.