

Living Streets – Creating a Better Balance

Paul Burden

Abstract

Living Streets: is about applying a philosophy that aims to involve people with interests in the street to jointly create a new balance between on street activities, pedestrians, bicycles, general traffic and adjacent landuses. On a higher level: it is about balancing land use, transport, environment and health

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Introduction

Trends worldwide indicate a steady rise in motor vehicle trips. Capacity improvements to accommodate these increases are quickly absorbed leading to a further demand for increased capacity which leads to any increases again being absorbed and so on and so on. The adverse effects of the motorcar are widespread and impacting adversely on our quality of life. There is a desire in Christchurch and other cities to address this issue. We believe that cars are very important and serve an important function. In fact we want to maintain the current levels of service for cars. However, we also want to improve our quality of life and ensure that the needs of cars are carefully balanced against the need for other modes of transport and other street activities and uses for road space. The mere introduction of competing demands on road space has already given rise to such initiatives as cycle lanes! By making the car compete in planning terms we begin to think about the form and structure we want our city to take. We start to think about our visions and missions in a different light. We start to think about what sort of city we would like are children and our children's children to grow up in.

Living Streets is about achieving a better balance.

A New Balance – All Roads are for Living

A common misconception is that “Living Streets” is another name for “Traffic Calming”. While many Living Streets will contain elements to calm adverse traffic behaviour they will also be environments that are, in their very nature, conducive to better driver behaviour. “Traffic Calming” has an association with speed humps and chicanes and historically is used predominantly within minor residential roads. However “Living Streets” is for **all** roads except those such as motorways or expressways that have a pure mobility function.

The traffic function of local roads can be limited to property access, however arterial and collector roads obviously have a much more significant function. Improving quality of life in these environments requires careful balance often between quite conflicting requirements. The traffic function of the road together with its impact not only on the local environment but also on the wider road network needs to be weighed against the desire to enhance quality of life at a localised level. These conflicting demands often result in the exploration of innovative and creative solutions. The key is to find the balance.

Rooms and Corridors

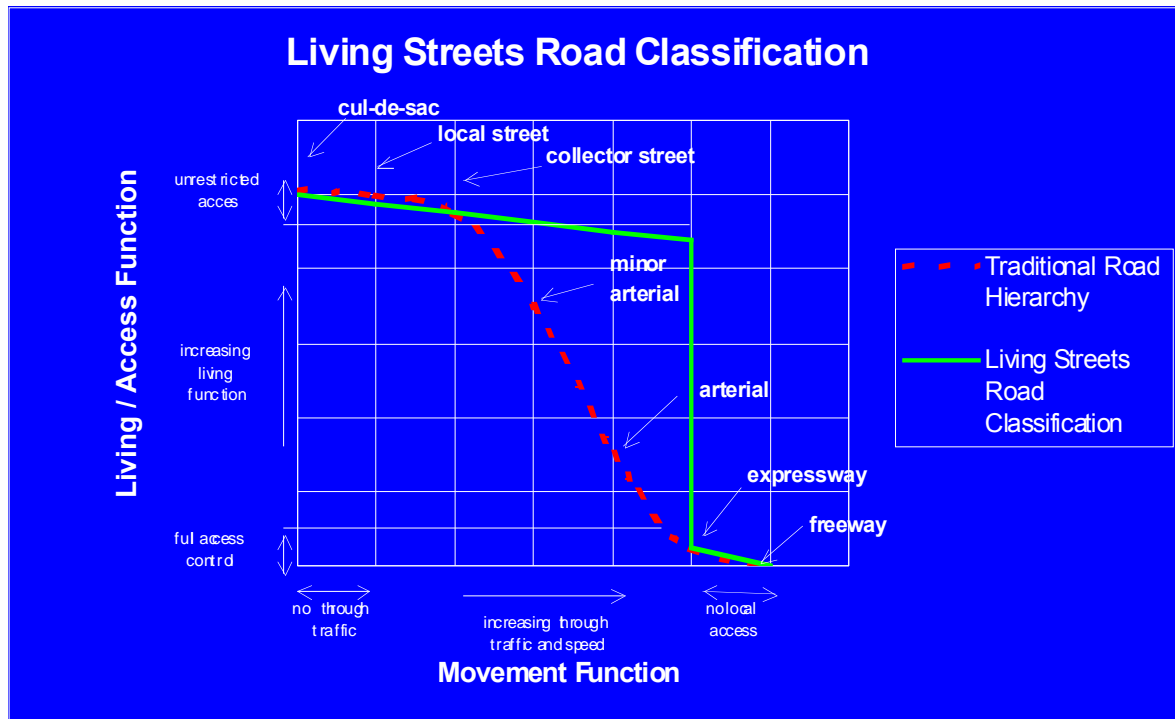
The “Rooms and Corridors” principle is generally accepted philosophy in Christchurch, which distinguishes streets for residential activities and serves an access function (rooms) from streets with predominantly a traffic mobility function (Corridors).

Typically, the rooms are designed to create environments with minimal impacts from traffic intrusion and slow traffic speeds. The corridors are designed to accommodate through traffic and connect suburbs and regions

The Living Streets Road Classification

Within the context of the Rooms and Corridors philosophy, Christchurch has adopted a traditional four-tier road hierarchy, dividing the road network into busy and less busy arterials and quiet and less quiet residential streets.

Figure 1



The difference in status between the four tiers is generally defined in engineering and planning terms with respect to traffic volumes, speeds road cross sections and adjacent land uses.

The rooms and corridors principle assumes that as the movement function of a road increases, its access function decreases, traffic volumes increase and speeds increase. The concept assumes a gradual shift in the balance between the access and movement functions.

The “Living Streets Road Classification” (refer Figure 1) recognises and supports the access function of **all** road environments. This concept requires a paradigm shift in the way the road system is treated, particularly collector/distributors and arterial roads. Although the Living Streets road classification recognises that these road types fulfil important movement functions, there is neither the need nor the desire to compromise their living or access functions, such as crossing, parking, driveways, bus stops, retail development and residential uses. After all people live on main roads too!

In many ways the new classification better reflects the actual way the road system is used, with extensive residential and retail land uses. Few main roads in Christchurch actually provide significant access constraints. Some minor access controls exist at limited locations such as medians and short sections of pedestrian fencing.

It is recognised, however that traditional local street traffic management controls, such as speed humps and chicanes, are less suitable for roads with an increasing movement function. Instead, traffic management controls could include slower speed zones with more and better crossing facilities to create localised balance between movement, accessibility and liveability.

Increasing the crossability of the roads requires lower thresholds for the implementation of some crossing facilities and increasing their frequency along a stretch of road.

In terms of longitudinal management of the road space, the Living Streets road classification supports a greater emphasis on public transport, bicycles, planting and other streetscape improvements which can be provided by the reallocation of road space from existing road reserves; essentially creating a new and better balance!

The Collaboration Process

With the priority being on the “living” and “community interaction” qualities of a street Living Streets cannot succeed by design alone. The design should facilitate the improved living experience and interaction of the community. Furthermore a successful living street cannot come from a drawing board and then be constructed. It must start at the community level. Participation and ownership by the community must be nurtured from the earliest stage. Above all else the community must be willing to embrace the new philosophies. The importance of this cannot be understated for we are challenging traditional practices and beliefs. In a sense the street design is the stage on which the various activities can be performed or the platform from which the “Living Street” can be launched.

In Christchurch traditionally we have developed scheme plans for road redesign and issued a publicity leaflet describing the extent of the project and calling for comments. This approach while suited to some projects may not provide stakeholders with a sense of ownership and may lower the overall quality of the project and outcome. When given the opportunity there is evidence to suggest that the people of this city do care about outcomes and can become committed collectively to enter into partnerships to achieve common goals. Living Streets aims to nurture community involvement and commitment to maximise the mutual benefits from

governance partnerships. This will not be achieved through informing, it can only be achieved through a higher level of public participation such as collaboration and empowerment.

What is the “Collaboration” Process?

The Collaboration process adopts the same objective and promise used by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (see fig. 2)

Figure 2 (reproduced with the permission of IAP2 – visit www.iap2.org)



The objective states: *“To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution”*

The promise to the public is: *“We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible”*

The promise and objective of collaboration is considerably different to that of “Inform”, “Consult” and “Involve” which is traditionally where most organisations, particularly Councils operate.

Not all projects will suit a collaboration process, however it is fundamentally important that the public are made aware at the outset what level of public impact you are seeking together with an objective and promise. In this way the public are aware of their role in project and will establish their expectations of their impact on the project outcomes from this basis.

Living Streets requires partnership. Successful partnerships tend to occur in environments of equality and those that nurture creativity, self worth and ownership. To this end Living Streets must operate in a collaborative manner.

The Strategic Planning Process for Living Streets

Like any major undertaking building and implementing a strategic planning process for Living Streets is vitally important to ensure that everyone is working towards common goals, that resources are targeted at the right areas and that there is an avenue for assessment and adjustment.

The Christchurch City Council **Vision**

“Enhancing the well being of the people of Christchurch and their city through effective local governance and the delivery of high quality services”

Living Streets **Mission**

“To create living streets and a living city where a variety of road environments support and encourage a better quality of life and a greater range of community and street activity.”

Key Result Areas (What we do)

1. In our dealing and work with people, we will improve communication, working relationships and seek their input in every phase of creating living and vibrant streets.

This relates to the “collaboration process” described above and is critical to the successful development of partnerships with communities.

2. Promote positive behavioural change in driver behaviour and route, mode and location choices.

This reflects the desire to enact cultural change and poses a considerable challenge. The same drive and determination needs to be exerted to that of the “Drink – Drive” campaign.

3. Strengthen and increase the use of all modes of public transportation
4. Ensure all funding for road and transport infrastructure benefits pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.
5. Ensure crossibility and accessibility for cyclists, pedestrians and vulnerable road users.

This result areas acknowledges and reinforces the desire to improve the balance on main roads as well as minor roads. Busy roads can divide communities and isolate facilities by preventing pedestrian and cycle access, so improving crossability and accessibility is integral to improving quality of life.

6. Create main roads that are living streets offering a diverse range of life enhancing activities.

This reflects the desire to ensure that main roads are also included and that main roads are often the centre stage for major activities

7. Extend the range of effective tools for local streets to meet community needs.

(The Christchurch City Council has developed a Living Streets “Tools Manual” that explores this)

8. Generate collective ownership and stewardship of local streets by their residents.
9. Strengthen inter-unit and external agency collaboration.
10. Minimise the negative impacts of car traffic in terms of health, safety and pollution.

Principles

Accept the “rooms and corridors” philosophy

Living Streets require more than technical engineering solutions

All streets except motorways are for living

Living Streets help create living cities

Street environments to set the stage for activities that enhance quality of life

Car drivers give way to people and vulnerable road users

Everything we do should be measured against quality of life

Change the priority (in terms of planning) to ensure better balance

- (1) Pedestrians
- (2) Cycles
- (3) Public Transport
- (4) Taxis
- (5) Service vehicles
- (6) Cars

Ensure the above priorities do not compromise current levels of service

Vision zero for road fatalities and growth in car kilometres travelled

Initiatives

Building Partnerships

Living Streets seeks to build partnerships with other organisations. Christchurch has many excellent examples of organisations coming together to achieve in concert what they cannot achieve alone.

Living Streets seeks partnership with organisations such as:

Healthy Christchurch: Already there are many organisations involved and any group, organisation, network or business with a commitment to the health and well being of Christchurch people can be involved. Health is defined as “*a state of physical, mental, spiritual, social and economic wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease.*”

<http://www.ccc.govt.nz/healthychristchurch/index.asp>

Push Play: is a partnership with Crown Public Health, Sport Canterbury, Heart Foundation, YMCA and the Christchurch City Council with an emphasis on getting people to exercise for 30 minutes a day. <http://www.hillarysport.org.nz/pushplay/>

Sustainable Cities and Sustainable Christchurch: want a sustainable future. They seek to trigger and promote sustainable urban and regional development, channel new energy into initiatives that add-value. They are taking up the challenge of making a positive contribution to energising the city as a vibrant and fair place for all people. <http://www.sustcities.org.nz/>

Specific Transport Initiatives

A number of specific transport initiatives have been developed that have synergies with Living Streets. Some of these include:

Safe Routes to School <http://www.ccc.govt.nz/saferoutes/>

Safe routes to school involves a partnership with the community, Police, Local Councils and schools. Out of this flows the Walking School bus which encourages walking and overcoming safety issues that may otherwise result in other modes being used. Also flowing from this is the 40kph school speed zones outside schools.

40kph Residential Speed Zones

The Christchurch City Council is about to trial an area wide 40kph within a character residential area. This is coupled with collaboration with the community and asset renewal. This will create a road environment conducive to slower speeds, which will be reinforced by a 40kph limit. The community will be encouraged to adopt a responsible attitude and not exceed the speed limit and will encourage their visitors to do the same.

Showpiece Projects

Christchurch City Council has been working on the development of Living Streets showpiece/pilot projects in which we are demonstrating the Living Streets philosophies. The streets selected for the pilots were chosen using a series of factors that optimised both our potential for success and our potential for gaining knowledge and understanding. As such the streets present a diverse range of environments, traffic function and stakeholder groups.

Conclusion

“Living Streets” changes the priority between people and cars, by giving people who live, work and visit in the streets greater measure of priority along with cars. Living Streets don’t just happen, they are created by clear and consistent political will and capacity of national, regional and local governments, which are actively supported by a coalition of local residents and businesses. Applying the philosophies of Living Streets and imbedding them into the business culture will lead to an improvement in our quality of life. Areas where Living Streets can be applied include:

Asset Renewal

Major changes to road environments tend to occur in association with the renewal of the kerbs and channels. This provides the basis for funding and a wealth of opportunity to adopt the Living Streets approach.

Retro – Fitting

Road environments can also be changed through “re-fitting” elements into the existing environment which requires specific funding. Traditional Local Area Traffic Management Schemes should be re-examined and refocused towards a Living Streets approach. In some cases this may mean sacrificing the quantity of projects for improved quality.

“Consultation”

Consideration should be given to how you “consult”. At the very least a consultation and communications plan should be developed for all public works. Any Living Streets project should involve collaboration.

Creating Partnerships

As mentioned there are opportunities for joining with other organisations to achieve common goals. A global network of organisations that share the philosophies of Living Streets is well established.

References

Christchurch Living Streets Tools Manual, Christchurch City Council, City Streets Unit.
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