



VICTA

Visual Impairment
Charitable Trust
Aotearoa (NZ)

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SUBMISSION
DRAFT DUNEDIN CITY TRANSPORT STRATEGY

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ABOUT VICTA:

VICTA is an energetic new Dunedin-based national charity. Our aim is to facilitate the independence, integration and well-being of the approximately 84,000 New Zealanders with vision loss that cannot be corrected by glasses, contact lenses, medicine or surgery, and is severe enough to impair their ability to perform the sort of everyday tasks that most people take for granted like driving, reading and shopping - but who are not blind enough to qualify for membership of the Royal NZ Foundation of the Blind.

Our monthly meetings attract up to 40 people. We are working on a pilot project to ensure that pedestrians with low vision are more visible. VICTA has recently received approval to become a Total Mobility Agency for Otago.

Our members are smart, articulate, mostly older folk, actively engaged with their families and communities. The combination of advancing age and poor vision puts them among the most vulnerable (and, if they continue to drive, among the most dangerous) road users. When it comes to planning for, and meeting, the challenges of leading an active life in Dunedin without a car, visually impaired people have an important and timely contribution to make.

AGE-RELATED VISION LOSS & MOTOR VEHICLES: A LETHAL COMBINATION

DRIVER STATISTICS: One in three Australians over the age of 80 has vision less than the legally required driving standard. Comparable figures are unavailable for NZ, but motor vehicle crash statistics show that older drivers make a disproportionately large contribution to road deaths in this country. In 2011, 8% of drivers killed were over the age of 80, despite that age group making up only 2.4% of car licence holders, and only 3.5% of the total NZ population. 'Defective vision' and 'impaired ability due to old age' were listed as significant contributing factors to motor vehicle crashes in 2011 (Ministry of Transport Yearly Report 2012).

PEDESTRIAN STATISTICS: Walking accounts for a higher proportion of trips taken by the 65 plus age group than the total population aged 15 and over - but all that walking comes at a cost. In 2011, pedestrians over the age of 70 had the second highest injury rate and the highest death rate of all pedestrians involved in motor vehicle crashes. 29% of the pedestrians killed and 10% of the pedestrians injured were over the age of 70, despite this age group making up only 9% of the New Zealand population (Census reports 2006, Ministry of Transport Report 2012).

PEDESTRIAN FACTORS: Older pedestrians involved in motor vehicle crashes are usually obeying the law. Unlike children or younger adults, older pedestrians are unlikely to be running, playing or lying on the road. Older pedestrians are also less

likely to be affected by alcohol than younger adults (Monash University Accident Research Centre report 1999).

HOSPITAL STATISTICS: For the 6778 road users in all categories (drivers, passengers, motorcyclists, cyclists, pedestrians & others) hospitalised as a result of motor vehicle accidents in 2011, the average length of stay was five days. For the 965 casualties over the age of 65, the burden on our health system was much greater (Ministry of Transport Yearly Report 2012):

MOTOR VEHICLE CASUALTIES: AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS OF STAY IN HOSPITAL BY AGE			
AGE	DRIVERS	PEDESTRIANS	ALL ROAD USERS
65 to 69	8	12	8
70 to 74	5	14	8
75 to 79	8	-	10
80 & over	8	14	10
All ages (from under 5 to 80 & over)	4	6	5

VICTA'S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS POSED IN THE DRAFT DUNEDIN CITY TRANSPORT STRATEGY.

1: The vision statement looks fine.

2: You have done an excellent job of pinpointing Dunedin's transport challenges.

In our view, the most critical challenge - multi-agency responsibilities for transport - is also the challenge with the most far-reaching consequences.

Having one agency responsible for public transport (the DCC) will enable our bus service to become more efficient and more responsive to local needs. This change will also have a positive flow-on effect on Dunedin's other transport challenges, primarily by helping to wean Dunedin road users off their dependence on cars. A good public transport system and less dependence on cars will, in turn:

- make our streets safer by reducing traffic density;
- improve public health by encouraging walking and cycling;
- improve social equity by making transport available to everyone who needs it;
- save money by using our diminishing supply of increasingly expensive fuel more efficiently;

- ensure that Dunedin's transport system is better placed to cope with the long-term challenges of an ageing population and any future threats and constraints to our transport infrastructure.

3: The five key areas of focus - safety, travel choices, centres, freight and resilience - are well considered and particularly relevant to the needs of vulnerable road users.

4: VICTA strongly supports a move toward lower traffic speeds, less through traffic and higher priority for pedestrians in the central city.

The same changes are needed in South Dunedin. According to 2004-2008 accident blackspot data, crashes at the Hillside Road/King Edward Street intersection caused more serious injuries than at any other blackspot in Otago. We appreciate that some work has been done, and is underway, in South Dunedin, but, as a recent front-page story in the *Star* demonstrated, older pedestrians still feel they are risking their lives when attempting to cross the street at the Hillside Road/King Edward Street intersection.

GENERAL SUBMISSION

• DRIVER SAFETY:

Many organisations provide information on when and why older drivers should stop driving, but fail to address the question of greatest concern to the elderly and disabled in this situation: "What am I supposed to do now?"

VICTA urges the DCC to ensure that Dunedin's future transport plan recognises the need for elderly and disabled people to maintain their interests and activities when they stop driving. Alternative transport options, and appropriate education and support concerning the availability and use of these options, needs to be part of Dunedin's long-term transport strategy.

• PEDESTRIAN SAFETY:

- **The magnitude of the problem:** Nearly 100,000 New Zealanders have vision loss severe enough to interfere with their ability to see oncoming traffic when crossing the road. But only 11,500 of these pedestrians are blind enough to be eligible for white canes or guide dogs. Consequently drivers have no way of identifying the more than 80,000 New Zealanders with poor eyesight (but who do not have white canes or guide dogs) who may step out in front of moving traffic in the mistaken belief that the road is clear.

- **Pedestrian visibility:** In response to road safety concerns raised by visually impaired Dunedin people, VICTA is working with other local agencies on a pilot Low Vision/High Visibility (LoViz/HiViz) project with the potential to go national, and

international. The project will feature attractive walking sticks, clothing and accessories in fluorescent yellow with white reflective highlights, and will be launched with a publicity campaign carrying the message: "We're not blind! We've just got terrible eyesight - so please look out for us when we're crossing the road because we might not see you!" The walking sticks will retail for around \$50. We expect to have a sample available in the next few weeks.

- **Traffic lights:** Older pedestrians have a high level of traffic light compliance compared to other age groups, but that doesn't save them from motor accidents. Part of the problem is that, when crossing the street, older people are slower to leave the kerb, and slower to reach the other side. The exclusive 'walk' phase for traffic lights in high pedestrian areas needs to allow for the reduced mobility and failing eyesight of older people.
- **Narrower roads:** VICTA suggests the DCC make roads in high pedestrian areas narrower by adding conveniently spaced kerb protrusions and median islands.
 - **Narrower roads will:**
 - reduce traffic speeds, thereby encouraging drivers to use alternative routes;
 - reduce the number of parking spaces in high pedestrian areas, thereby -
 - encouraging drivers to park further away (preferably in free or low cost parking spaces near transport hubs) and then walk, cycle or take the bus;
 - reducing the risk of pedestrians stepping out into traffic from between parked cars (a recognised cause of motor vehicle accidents involving pedestrians);
 - reduce the distance that people with poor mobility and low vision have to walk in order to cross the road. .
 - **Kerb protrusions will also:**
 - enable pedestrians waiting to cross the road to be more visible to motorists.
 - **Median islands will also:**
 - enable elderly and disabled people to assess the traffic coming from one direction before leaving the kerb, and give them a place to pause and assess the traffic coming from the other direction before completing the journey;
 - spare elderly and disabled people the effort of walking all the way to the next intersection in order to cross safely to a destination directly across the road.

• **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

VICTA strongly supports the DCC's bus network and scheduling proposal and would like to add these comments: .

- To enable visually impaired people with poor colour vision to identify buses, large high-contrast letters or numbers, as well as colours for different routes, will be needed.
- Increasing the price of on-street parking, and making ample free or low cost parking available near transport hubs will encourage motorists to use the buses.
- A good bus service is vital for the wellbeing of visually impaired people. Statistics NZ's 2006 post-census disability survey found that people with visual disabilities use public transport far more than people with other disabilities, and have more difficulty doing so.

Many of the difficulties experienced by visually impaired people using Dunedin buses are also experienced by non-disabled people. These difficulties include:

- reading and understanding the timetable;
- locating the right bus stop;
- crossing to and from the bus stop on roads where there are no pedestrian crossings (some visually impaired people travel to the end of the route and alight on the return journey in preference to crossing the road from a bus stop near their home);
- waiting at a bus stop when there is nowhere to sit down;
- having a nonexistent or ineffective bus shelter on a rainy day;
- identifying the right bus;
- getting on and off the bus when the steps and kerb are not clearly marked;
- identifying the right bus stop;
- getting directions from the bus stop to one's destination;
- having no convenient public transport service in the evenings and weekends.

• **THE NEED FOR A DOOR-TO-DOOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT OPTION**

Most sports matches, cultural events and other community activities are held at evenings and weekends. The lack of an adequate bus service at these times means that, to avoid becoming socially isolated, visually impaired people who want to keep up their interests have to take a cab. Even with the benefit of the Total Mobility Scheme, the added cost of a two-way taxi fare is a great disincentive to remaining engaged with the community.

Even when a regular bus service is available, for some elderly and disabled people the bus option too difficult, especially at night or during bad weather.

VICTA urges the DCC to explore options for an affordable door to door cab-share scheme based on one of the many successful models used in cities overseas.
