

Relevant Information for Council

FILE: X092554 **DATE:** 21 June 2024

TO: Lord Mayor and Councillors

FROM: Kim Woodbury, Chief Operating Officer

THROUGH: Monica Barone PSM, Chief Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Information Relevant To Item 11.3 – Post Exhibition – A City for Walking Strategy and Action Plan – Continuing the Vision

Alternative Recommendation

It is resolved that

- (A) Council note the submissions and feedback received through the public exhibition period as shown at Attachment A to the subject report;
- (B) Council adopt A City for Walking: Strategy and Action Plan - Continuing the Vision incorporating amendments following the public exhibition process, as shown at Attachment C to the subject report, ***noting that the City will more closely examine and address the accessibility issues associated with raised crossings for people with low vision or blindness once the Strategy is adopted***; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor amendments to A City for Walking: Strategy and Action Plan - Continuing the Vision in order to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication.

Additions shown in ***bold italics***.

Purpose

To provide further details about the City's current design of raised crossings and accessibility issues raised at the Transport, Heritage and Planning Committee meeting on 17 June 2024.

To outline a proposed way forward to improve the accessibility of the City's designs for raised pedestrian crossings and continuous footpath treatments.

Background

A speaker at the meeting of the Transport, Heritage and Planning Committee on 17 June 2024 raised concerns about how some types of raised crossings that the City implements are less accessible to some people with low vision or blindness, given the potential risk in determining the interface between a footpath and a carriageway (despite the use of tactiles). Councillors requested further information on the issues she raised and a proposed way forward to address them.

The City regularly implements raised crossings. They calm traffic and reduce vehicle speeds, give priority under the NSW Road Rules to people crossing the road and make it easier for more people to cross, such as people in wheelchairs. There are two main types of raised crossings; (a) 'wombat crossings', which are raised zebra crossings at the same level as the footpath (b) 'continuous footpath treatments', which are when the footpath continues at the same level across a side street or driveway.

Both types of raised crossings are widely accepted in industry as best practice, since they have been shown to be very effective at traffic calming, reinforcing road rules and making pedestrians more visible to people driving. There are Australian standards and guidance that inform the City's designs in specific locations. They are generally well liked by our community, including many people with disability – in particular, they are easier for people using wheelchairs to navigate than kerb ramps and crossings at road level.

However, during public consultation, the City received two submissions about the accessibility of these crossings for people who are blind or have low vision. The main points both submissions made are:

- Because these crossings are the same level as the footpath, the transition between footpath and road environment is unclear and hence dangerous for people with low vision or blindness.
- Guide dogs and people using canes are unable to detect raised crossings, which means people with vision impairment need assistance to navigate them.
- The tactile indicators the City uses should be used in conjunction with other design cues to indicate the user is entering a roadway and are not sufficient on their own.

The City acknowledges the importance of the issues raised and the need to find a design solution that is more universally accessible while also achieving the same traffic calming outcomes as raised crossings. The City's review of designs will explore the range of research on this issue, including:

- A study commissioned by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT in 2023 (Attachment A) notes that 80 per cent of people with vision impairment lack confidence using crossings where the footpath and road are at the same level.
- The Road Safety Audit Tool for Pedestrians who are Vision Impaired (Victoria Walks, 2014 - Attachment B) to which Guide Dogs Australia is a signatory, notes that "the safety of zebra crossings could potentially be significantly improved by raising/elevating the crossing to the level of the footpath (a raised crossing or wombat crossing), to slow traffic speed".

Action 8 of the draft Walking Strategy provides the way forward. Part of Action 8 is to review and update our design guidance for crossings, with a focus on ensuring increased

accessibility for all users. We have funding committed to progress this action in the 2024/25 financial year, and the proposed process includes:

- Reviewing current research, guidance and best practice related to crossing design for people with vision impairment both in Australia and overseas.
- Engaging with Inner West Council and Better Streets who are currently undertaking a similar review of crossing design.
- Engaging with the Inclusion (Disability) Advisory Panel.
- Procuring design advice from a disability consulting firm.

We note that any change in design of raised crossings needs to be widely adopted across NSW to be most effective, since consistency is important for people with low vision or blindness to be able to navigate their environment. This means that the City will need to engage with Transport for NSW during the process and advocate for them to also update their standards and technical specifications.

Memo from Kim Woodbury, Chief Operating Officer

Prepared by: Sarah Brickhill, Manager Transport Planning

Attachments

Attachment A. Guide Dogs Australia 2023 Survey Findings

Attachment B. Victoria Walks Road Safety Audit Tool for Pedestrians who are Vision Impaired

Approved

P. M. Barone

MONICA BARONE PSM

Chief Executive Officer