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Designing Slowbart

It's time to redesign our city with pedestrians in mind, writes Hobart City Council Greens Alderman HELEN BURNET

IT is little wonder there are so many incidents causing injury and mortality to pedestrians in our city — the car is king on our streets and roads.

Hobart is designed for vehicular traffic with little regard for pedestrians. Speed is often to blame for injury to pedestrians but so is the way we have built and continue to plan our city.

Narrow footpaths and wide roads continue to be the order of the day. The recently approved Menzies Centre development at the corner of Campbell St and Liverpool St has failed to enhance the pedestrian experience. No doubt we'll see similar problems there as witnessed at other pedestrian black-spots, if we continue to implement the "car first, pedestrian last" approach to urban planning.

A further reduction of speed in our central city streets would make pedestrians safer. It seems incredible that next to the hospital the zone is 60km. Lets make it 50 or even 40km/h in this area where many disabled and older visitors frequent.

It is not just about the safety of pedestrians to which I am referring, it is about the experience people have in Hobart too. A slower pace provides a better experience. People choose to shop, dine and live in areas which are designed for pedestrians. It is no coincidence that across the world, people are returning to live in vibrant inner cities.

One of the best examples and one relatively close to home is Melbourne. The transformation of its inner city makes it an easily traversable, excitingly designed space. The quantum leap in urban design that prioritises pedestrians and cyclists has enhanced the whole visit, making Melbourne one of the great cities. That hasn't happened by accident, but by careful consideration of what makes people want to stay longer when they visit, and have

a more enjoyable place to work, play and live.

This gives Melbourne the edge over its rival, Sydney. It is no coincidence that Sydney has employed the same Danish architectural firm to improve its liveability rating. The same suggestions are being taken up there to improve pedestrian and cycle access, and public transport priorities.

I was fortunate enough to visit this firm, Jan Gehl Architects, while in Copenhagen in July. The firm has worked across the world providing sustainable solutions for local urban design problems.

Copenhagen's own urban planning accentuates access to green and blue spaces. This approach is inherently part of that city council's direction, with the Mayor actively championing an increase in the amount of time each week each person in Copenhagen spends in these beautiful parts of the city. It is part of their city's strategic plan. It allows the city's residents to relax close to water or in parks, because those at Town Hall see the overall benefits to the health and wellbeing of residents and visitors alike.

Hobart has a rich natural and built beauty which we fail to really appreciate with our current approach to design. Our stunning heritage buildings are often driven past at high speed, or are unable to be fully appreciated from narrow footpaths. There is the opportunity to showcase our beautiful city, and most importantly make it safer for all.

Unfortunately my bid to improve the pedestrian experience and safety of the Elizabeth St bus mall could not be accommodated by Metro. So we'll continue to have little room for pedestrians crammed on narrow footpaths there.

The revitalised pedestrian zones council has created, such as North Hobart's Elizabeth St, make the pedestrian experience better. However, there is a great deal more work to be done. We need to link people and places much more effectively.

There are plenty of areas in which we can make the city easier to traverse on foot. We have a relatively small city often choked by cars which would be further enhanced by making it pedestrian-friendly, and returning nature to some of our urbanscapes. Traffic light settings that favour those on foot, lower speed zones, and even car-free streets would be a start.



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One of the most abhorrent physical scars of our city is that which divides the waterfront from the rest of the city. Davey St and Macquarie St are two four-lane highways of high volume, high-speed cars and heavy vehicles including log trucks.

While major engineering feats may cost millions and could take years to build, a simple and quick fix for this would be to reduce speeds along these city roads, particularly when pedestrian numbers are high. Lunchtime and weekends would be the obvious time to drop traffic speeds to 40km/h. Set pedestrian crossings to give people more time to get across these lanes. Put pedestrians first to ensure the safer and arguably more enjoyable movement of people across that great divide.

It is time to re-think how people move within our city. Getting them to and from the city is

another challenge. Building more car parks is not the way to change that culture of car-reliance. Government support for options such as improvements to public transport, cycleways and car-pooling services will help. Reducing cars in the city will definitely improve the overall experience for all.

Pedestrians, the disabled, cyclists and car drivers alike are equal players when it comes to road safety. With better design and consideration, the safety and enjoyment can be improved in our beautiful city.

● **Helen Burnet has been a Greens Alderman on Hobart City Council since March 2005. She is a member of the Development and Environmental Services Committee, and chairs the councils community Access Advisory Committee and the Bicycle Advisory Committee. Ald Burnet's recent trip to Copenhagen to look at cycling infrastructure was sponsored by the council.**



PEAK HOUR: Afternoon traffic in Macquarie St, Hobart.