

Griffith/Narrabundah Community Association Inc.

Comments on the Government's proposals on Traffic Calmers in and around Flinders Way

Summary

The Griffith Narrabundah Community Association recommends that the Government take the following actions in and around Flinders Way, Griffith with respect to the Flinders Way Traffic Calming Scheme.

1. The Government consider whether it wishes to depart from its previously declared policy and reduce maximum speeds on some Major Collector Roads (such as Flinders Way) to 50 kilometres per hour.
2. If the Government wishes to proceed with the policy change proposed in Point 1, it should seek public input to a proposal that a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit be applied along the whole length of Flinders Way from Mugga Way to Canberra Avenue.
3. All the speed cushions be removed, except those at the Monaro Crescent/Flinders Way intersection – which is by far the most dangerous intersection on Flinders Way. These speed cushions should be moved closer to the roundabout so that vehicles are not able to accelerate excessively between the speed cushions and the roundabout.
4. The intersections at Murray Crescent/Flinders Way and La Perouse/Flinders Way be reassessed after a year.
5. The consultation by the government with the stakeholders and the local community on this scheme has been very poor and the feedback obtained appears to have been ignored.

Background

Flinders Way is a **Major Collector Road** that carried over 3,700 vehicles per day before the speed cushions were installed. According to the ACT Road Hierarchy “*Major collector roads collect and distribute traffic within residential, industrial and commercial areas. They form the link between the primary network and the roads within local areas*” and “*Typically the speed limit on access streets and minor collector roads is 50 km/h, major collector roads is 60 km/h*”. The Residential Subdivision Development Code confirms (p14) that the desirable speed limit is 60 km/h and the traffic volume 3,000 to 6,000 vehicles per day. We contend that Flinders Way is suited for this role because, although it is over 1.6 kilometres in length, it hosts less than 30 private residences and these are all situated on one side of the road. Several Major Collector Roads in Canberra have dwellings on each side of the road.

As it appears that average speeds on Flinders Way were below the speed limit, and the 85%ile only slightly above the limit, it is not clear why it was felt necessary or convenient to introduce major Traffic Calming measures along Flinders Way in the first place. Nor does the likely impact of such measures in diverting traffic into neighbouring side streets with lower

speed limits and lower capacities appear to have been anticipated. The May 2012 report 'Flinders Way Traffic Calming Scheme Evaluation' (FWTCSE) gives no indication as to whether alternative traffic calming measures were considered (such as the chicanes used on Dalrymple Street), nor why it was decided to place the speed cushions at thirteen different locations without trialling such elements as layout (*e.g.* selectively placement across the road (as has been done) *vs.* a continuous strip across the road). The costs and benefits to the Government and to users of the road do not appear to have been assessed or even considered.

We were told by Tony Gill that the speed cushions were installed in response to residents' complaints about speeding in Flinders Way (*Letter from Tony Gill, 19 February 2012*). However, according to the FWTCSE report, only three of the local residents consulted in 2010 supported the proposed scheme and, as far as we can ascertain, none of the main stakeholders such as the Boys Grammar School, the NRMA or any of the local community groups were consulted at this stage. We therefore conclude that the \$130,000 scheme was supported by only three of the local residents. In the FWTCSE report 77 percent of a sample size of 163 did not support the calming measures implemented in Flinders Way. Assuming an error of about 7% (not unreasonable in a sample of this size) this suggests that between 70% and 85% of the population oppose the scheme. It can never be considered as having public endorsement.

Nevertheless, we recognise, from the accident statistics that from a road safety perspective there is room for improvement, particularly in the midblock stretch between Murray Crescent and La Perouse Street, and at the intersection of Monaro Crescent and Flinders Way. In the midblock stretch of concern there were three accidents in the 10 months before May 2011 and two in the 9 months from June 2011, or five accidents in 20 months. This probably requires more than a generalised attempt to slow down traffic along the whole stretch of road and a more site-specific solution might be more effective and certainly worth consideration. At the Monaro Crescent and Flinders Way intersection the crash rate (28 crashes in five years) is twice as high as at any other intersection, and again localised intervention at this trouble spot should be considered.

We therefore have a situation where most of the local community do not like the speed cushions, but there is a strong case to improve the safety of the road because of the high number of traffic accidents. We see the challenge is to make Flinders Way safer without using so many speed cushions.

Comments on the FWTCSE report

Objectives need to be quantified

In the May 2012 FWTCSE report the objectives of the traffic calming scheme on Flinders Way were to:

- 1. Improve road safety, especially at the various intersections on Flinders Way*
- 2. Reduce travel speeds, especially at the approaches to the intersections on Flinders Way.*
- 3. Reduce traffic volumes on Flinders Way*

Objectives (2) and (3) have not been quantified, and therefore it is not possible to assess the extent to which they have been met by installing the speed cushions. In other words, the numerical goals for traffic volumes and travel speeds should have been defined and the reasons for choosing these numbers provided.

The term ‘acceptable limits’ is used in the report for traffic speeds, but it is not stated what these are or why they are acceptable. To state in the report that ‘*speed cushions have effectively achieved the desired outcomes*’ when the desired outcomes have not been quantified is not good science nor good policy. The need to reduce speeds along Flinders Way might be more apparent if some comparison of speed distributions on other Major Collector Roads had been provided. In addition while the measures appear to have been effective in reducing traffic speeds along Flinders Way, these were minor excursions beyond the 60 km/h speed limit (with at worst 15% of traffic exceeding the speed limit by 6% on weekdays and by 10% on weekends. Now even the fastest 15% of traffic on Flinders Way travels at below the speed limit, but traffic on Stokes, Torres and Vancouver travels at between 11% and 21% above the speed limit on weekends and 11% to 24% above the speed limit on weekdays. It appears likely that there has been a net decrease in road safety as a result of the speed cushions.

In relation to traffic volumes the key questions are: If the road is considered safe, why should the traffic volumes be reduced? And how (and to what extent) is safety increased by diverting traffic from a Major Collector Road onto local access streets? These questions have not been addressed.

In more general terms, it appears that the proposal to introduce speed cushions along Flinders Way was not subject to any of the three principal policy evaluation yardsticks of Equity, Efficiency and Efficacy.

In relation to Equity, the concern would be that any effort to improve the situation on Flinders Way did not reduce the welfare of other members of the community, and if this were not possible, to be able to demonstrate that the benefits from introducing traffic calming measures outweigh any costs falling elsewhere.

In relation to Efficiency one would like to be aware of how much benefit was expected to be gained per public dollar spent, and how this compared with alternative solutions. There is no analysis of the extra kilometres travelled as a result of the speed cushions and how the extent to which the side streets are now more dangerous.

In relation to Efficacy, one would like to know how effective the proposed measures were in achieving the defined target. From the evidence in the FWTCSE report these analyses do not appear to have been undertaken.

A 50 km/s speed limit would make Flinders Way safer

One option to make Flinders Way safer, would be to lower the speed limit to 50 km/hr over the whole length, from Canberra Avenue to Mugga Way. However, this would appear to be in the face of explicit policies in relation to the Road Hierarchy but nevertheless is worthy of consideration. If we use the data in tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 in the FWTCSE report and average the ratio $V_{85\%}/V_{av}$ for both weekend and weekday observations for both before and after the speed cushions we obtain $\sim 1.15 \pm 0.03$ as an average value of $V_{85\%}/V_{av}$ for the sections of

road tested. Consequently if the speed limit was set at 50 km/hr, and if it is the case that we can assume similar scaling factors, then the average weekday speed would be ~47 km/hr and the 85%ile would be ~54 km/hr. Notice that we have not factored in any slowing effect for the speed cushions at the Monaro Crescent/Flinders Way intersection. We do not consider these speeds to be unreasonable for these sections of Flinders Way. In any case these estimates are slower than the current speeds measured along Stokes, Torres and Vancouver Streets (see Table 4.4.1). In this regard, because average and 85%ile speeds on Vancouver exceed the 50 km/h speed limit it is unclear why this is less of a concern than the previous lower incidence of speeding along Flinders Way.

In other words, if a 50 km/hr speed limit was introduced the traffic would be slowed without the annoying bumps in the road, and motorists would not be using up unnecessary fuel and generating unnecessary greenhouse gases by having to brake and accelerate over the bumps and/or travel extra distances to avoid them. Why was not a 50 km/hr speed limit considered? If this approach is regarded as unsuitable, were alternatives such as the introduction of chicanes on the approaches to intersections given consideration?

Lateral extent of the speed cushions

On the one hand the government is saying that the ‘*speed cushions have effectively achieved the desired outcomes*’ and on the other hand it is saying that the cushions are going to be extended across the whole width of the road. Why is this necessary if the present arrangement is satisfactory? Why was not the optimal layout of the speed cushions identified before all 13 sets of speed cushions were deployed? Before any further work is undertaken it would be desirable to identify the cost benefits involved to extend each set of cushions across the entire road. Does the Directorate know which sites give the largest “bang per buck”?

Tackle the worst accident spots first

As the accident statistics in the FWTCSE report indicate; the main problems are midblock between Murray Crescent and La Perouse Street, and the roundabout at the intersection of Monaro Crescent and Flinders Way. The source of the problem at the mid block site is not clear. We therefore recommend that further research be undertaken to identify the source of the problem. The danger at the intersection is caused by high hedges in Monaro Crescent along the northern approach to the roundabout. These significantly reduce the visibility of all traffic proceeding south towards the Flinders Way roundabout. We therefore recommend that the speed cushions remain at this intersection. We also recommend that the speed cushions be re-positioned closer to the roundabout. At present drivers can accelerate quite rapidly in the distance between the speed cushions and the roundabout. The ‘post speed cushions’ accident statistics in the FWTCSE report (Table 4.3.1) confirm that even with the speed cushions present that intersection is still not safe. The speed cushions need to be moved closer to the roundabout.

Some disadvantages of the speed cushions

The FWTCSE report does not fully consider the negative impacts of the speed cushions.

1. The speed cushions have made ~500 daily journeys take longer routes (see table 4.2.1), thus using more fossil fuel and generating more greenhouse gases – these effects have not been factored into the analysis.

2. All the speed cushions force more braking and accelerating, resulting in more wear on all the vehicles using Flinders Way together with increase use of fuel and more greenhouse gases generated.
3. People with damaged vertebrae and other similar disabilities are disadvantaged, they are being forced to take longer routes.
4. Although the volume of traffic using Stokes, Vancouver and Torres streets may be acceptable there appears to be similar speed statistics (as a percentage exceeding the speed limit) as there was in Flinders Way before the speed cushions were installed there.
5. The cost of \$130,000 is only a partial cost of the scheme. It has not taken into account the resources used to measure speeds and volumes, write reports or the extra times spent by motorists to reach their destinations.
A simple 50 km/hr speed limit and some speed cushions around the most dangerous intersection could have been installed much more cheaply.

Consultation

The consultation process leaves room for considerable improvement. Not all the stakeholders live along Flinders Way, so just consulting these was not a valid process, and could be expected to reflect what might naively be perceived as good for Flinders Way residents rather than the community benefit as a whole. To interpret a respondents' indication that they were "*satisfied with this opportunity to provide feedback*" as an indication that the said respondent was satisfied with "*community engagement*" might be characterised as heroic.

"*Engagement*" would have involved talking to the community about what they wanted before doing anything, and most of the survey respondents weren't consulted. Consequently it is possible that the respondents were unhappy with the overall level of engagement, but glad that they got to provide at least some feedback.

The second round of consultation was more comprehensive than the first, but to delay the publication of the FWTCSE report from May 2012 until 30 November 2012, when the government's decision was also announced, hardly provides enough time for stakeholders to analyse the report and provide feedback - particularly when the government announced that the changes to be made would be completed in December 2012. All things considered, it might have been better for the Government if the public had had the opportunity to comment of the Directorate's report before making its decision on the next steps.



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