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## PORT MORESBY'S ROADS: ARE THEY PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY?

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### Key Points

- Complete pedestrian friendly roads and streets are important for the safety and welfare of citizens.
- Pedestrian friendly streets also facilitate economic development activities and positively enhance the socio-cultural life of residents.
- Most Papua New Guineans do not have vehicles; they either walk or depend on public transport.
- Pedestrian safety has been given little consideration in the planning and development of road infrastructure in Port Moresby. As a result, many of the city's roads and streets are not safe for pedestrians.
- It is important that pedestrian safety is given priority and adequate provision is made on existing and on the development of new roads and infrastructure.

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## PORT MORESBY'S ROADS: ARE THEY PEDESTRIAN FRIENDLY?

By Elizabeth Kopel

This article addresses the importance of planning, design and provision of safe, pedestrian friendly roads in Port Moresby. With rapid urbanisation, there is a growing problem of traffic congestion on the roads. The Governor of NCD has recently announced that more roads will be constructed (Kip, 2015:1&3). This may ease the burden of traffic congestion. But most Papua New Guineans living in urban areas do not have cars. In the discussions about more roads, there appears to be a missing link: the welfare and convenience of pedestrians has not been accounted for.

### Complete streets?

A complete pedestrian friendly street is a safe, comfortable, and convenient street for all users: pedestrians, cyclists, cars, public transport users, those with special needs and people of all ages (Burden and Litman, 2011). Pedestrian friendly streets are supported by a complex system of planning and development of infrastructure, and education and training of people who have to use this system. They are also supported by monitoring and regulatory agencies responsible for ensuring appropriate use of the system. Improved pedestrian friendly streets therefore require all parts of the system to function well. This article focuses on the planning, design and development of appropriate infrastructure for pedestrian friendly roads and streets.

For too long, roads have been designed and built for motorists only, without any provision for pedestrians and users of public transport. This renders them effectively incomplete and hazardous for the majority of people. Planning, engineering design and construction of complete streets should be considered from the beginning. It should not be an afterthought.

The lack of provision for complete streets partly reflects and is influenced by a long standing tradition of failure in policy and planning systems to build holistic human settlements.

New residential estates are established without building supporting infrastructure and essential services that can contribute to thriving socio-cultural life, economic enterprise and improved wellbeing. Such essential infrastructure and services include areas for recreation and sports, health and education facilities, markets, shops and service industries. These can also contribute to income and employment creating opportunities. The absence of pedestrian friendly streets with essential services means that many residential estates are in effect empty compounds.

There are serious long term negative effects of incomplete streets and poorly planned human settlements. Side streets within neighborhoods can effectively become children's playgrounds. Informal entrepreneurs turn street-corners into markets. Residents transform homes into shops, leading incomplete streets into scenes of disorder, often covered with litter.

### Why do we need complete streets?

Pedestrian friendly urban planning and development is essential for safety. In addition, it gives people a choice to decide what mode of transport to use: walking, cycling, public transport or driving. Most Papua New Guineans rely on public transport. The provision of crossings, sidewalks and suitably located bus stops are essential for smooth and easy flow of human traffic.

The provision of safe streets, parks and recreation areas has potential health benefits as it facilitates walking, exercise and sport (Waldock, 2012). It also has environmental benefits with less use of vehicles reducing carbon emissions and saving fuel costs. More broadly, all-encompassing pedestrian friendly towns and cities with complete streets are hubs of thriving socio-cultural life. They provide an enabling environment that promotes and facilitates economic enterprise and broad-based growth.

Papua New Guinea's National Policy for the Informal Economy recognises the importance of providing an enabling environment for the informal economy to flourish. That includes both tangible and non-tangible public goods and services:

environmental planning and provision of infrastructure such as roads, markets and transport; and appropriate regulations which are central to promote and facilitate informal economic activities (IS, PNG, 2010). In this regard, provision for pedestrian friendly roads/streets is a crucial element that falls under the banner of an enabling environment. The lack of access to private transport is a common characteristic shared by informal economy participants, which comprise the majority of Papua New Guinea's citizens. They depend on Public Motor Vehicles (PMVs) or walk to access services and transport commodities between homes, markets and shops. Complete streets will enable people to move around, conducting daily activities safely in an efficient and effective manner.

### What is wrong with existing roads?

The planning, engineering design and construction of roads and infrastructure development projects in Port Moresby has been done almost entirely for vehicles. There has been little concern for pedestrians and their safety and convenience. Existing roads are incomplete and provision for pedestrians is grossly inadequate. Where there are provisions, many are inappropriate or not user friendly.

### Crossings

There are few pedestrian crossings in Port Moresby. Clear road markings, all-weather reflective sign posts and flashing amber beacons can serve to warn motorists to reduce speed on an approach to a crossing. However, these are largely absent in Port Moreby. Road markings and signs are unclear, while existing zebra crossings are not easily visible to motorists. Lack of understanding about traffic laws sees many drivers that are new to the city driving straight through crossings instead of giving priority to pedestrians. A large number of motorists habitually drive through crossings regardless of whether or not there are people waiting to cross.

### Under passes or overhead bridges

The only long completed overhead bridge in Port Moresby, at 4 Mile, was built over twenty years ago, but it is not user friendly. While the entrance from the main bus stop has a slight slope to make it easier for people to enter, the exit on the other side has an extremely steep descending flight of stairs that makes it impossible for anyone with mobility issues to access. The bridge is also unsafe to use, especially for women. Pocket pickers loiter around the bridge, snatch hand bags and can quickly escape (The National, 2015). More overhead bridges are under construction at Koki, Hohola and Vision City. While the presence of more overhead crossings is

commendable, they can only be accessed by strong and able bodied pedestrians. Those with special needs, including the blind, wheel chair users, the aged and those carrying heavy goods from the market and shops, are effectively excluded from the crossing. The basic principle behind constructing an overhead pass is to reduce the risk of crossing. While the overhead crossings mentioned here will reduce the risk of road crossing to pedestrians, they remain inaccessible for many local residents, who will continue to risk their safety through direct street crossing.

### Sidewalks and paths

In the absence of sidewalks, people take random routes, including walking on roads, putting their lives at risk. Where provisions are made, sidewalks are often located too close to fast moving traffic without barriers between motorists and the pedestrians. Property owners along roads often fence off their territory too close to sidewalks, leaving pedestrians to literally trail on the kerbs.

On a positive note, there are a few good examples of pedestrian friendly sidewalks in Port Moresby, particularly along the Murray Barracks roundabout to the Hohola Freeway intersection, from Waigani to Tokarara, on John Guise Drive, and on the section of the road between the Nature Park and Renbo estate. But more needs to be done to provide improved sidewalks to existing roads and future developments.

### Traffic lights

Traffic lights have been effective in controlling the movement of vehicles at traffic junctions in Port Moresby over the last decade. However not all of them have a pedestrian initiated signal that can allow people to cross safely. Accommodating pedestrian crossing signals at existing traffic lights is a better option than constructing costly overhead passes that are not safe or user friendly.

At busy junctions, such as the Waigani Police Station and Tokarara traffic lights, allowing a one minute red light for all motorists to stop would enable pedestrians to cross all sides of the junction. Currently only one traffic light in Port Moresby, at Erima, allows for pedestrians to cross. Many motorists and pedestrians are, however, not fully aware of its purpose. The roles of the Motor Vehicle Insurance and Licensing (MVIL) and the National Road Safety Authority are vital in both driver and pedestrian education on traffic rules, particularly at lights and crossings.

### A Case Study: Waigani Drive

- a) **Garden-Hills estate:** there are shops through to the new Central Waigani Shopping Centre and Paradise Cinema. There are also shops and offices on the opposite side and bus stops are on both sides of the road. But there is no crossing for pedestrians to get to and from one side to the other.
- b) **Intersection of Waigani Drive and Spring Garden Road:** provision of footpath at the tunnel is far too narrow and unsafe for pedestrians to cross.
- c) **Waigani Drive between Spring Garden and Wards Roads:** Westpac and BSP Banks mainly attract high traffic on one side while Theodist, VodaFone/B Mobile and City Pharmacy are among the biggest businesses on the opposite side. Again there are bus stops on both sides of the road without any crossing.

It is equally as hard to get across to the Sir John Guise Stadium side of the road from Holiday Inn, Kina Bank, the Department of Lands, Department of Health, Eda Ranu, National Planning, Lamana Hotel, and the National Capital District Commission (NCDC) without a safe crossing.

- e) **Vision City:** Crossing Waigani Drive from Vision City has been extremely hazardous because of fast flowing traffic. Construction of the overhead bridge, an afterthought to connect Vision City to NCDC, is a much needed development.
- f) **Waigani police station:** The location is extremely busy with people getting on and off buses on both sides of the road. There are no marked crossings so pedestrians are forced to manoeuvre their way across the road between queues of traffic.

### What should be done? Options

A number of actions are recommended to make the streets of Port Moresby more complete. These can improve pedestrian safety and provide an enabling environment that facilitates economic and social activities and improvements in overall well-being.

#### Establish user friendly overhead bridges and underpasses

Establish user friendly overhead bridges/underpasses. A repeat of the inappropriate 4 Mile and Hohola style of overhead bridges should be avoided. Pedestrian friendly walkways designed and built for use by everyone inclusive of those with special needs would be a welcome change. Moreover, the development of such infrastructure should also endeavor to address petty crimes that occur at such crossings.

#### Provide sidewalks

Adequate provision of safe sidewalks for both new and existing roads is essential. Where it is feasible, sidewalks should be located well away from traffic. Paved sidewalks that are separated by barriers or street furniture such as lamp posts, street signs and green strips of grass, combined with tree planting, can provide shade and protect pedestrians from moving traffic.

#### Fit cross walk signals at traffic lights

New and existing traffic lights should be fitted with a pedestrian activated signal that allows people to cross. Pedestrians shouldn't be seen risking their lives manoeuvring through

queues of traffic at random. Channeling the flow of pedestrians with barriers such as railings, bollards with chains and landscaping would stop crossings at prohibited areas and improve safety.

#### Crossings

Clearly marked pedestrian crossings should be placed at pedestrian crossings in busy traffic areas. Pedestrians cross roads where it is convenient, therefore provision should be made in busy traffic areas such as bus stops, markets, shopping centres, office complexes, banks, hospitals, and schools.

There are different types of crossings. Zebra crossings have already been adopted in the National Capital District. Examples include Koki market, and the split zebra crossings at the Port Moresby General Hospital, Murray Barracks/Ted Diro Primary School, the Institute of Public Administration and the University of Papua New Guinea. Split crossings separated by an island are useful on wide roads as they enable people to cross in two stages.

Other types of crossings operate using traffic lights. Such options can be considered with appropriate public education of motorists and pedestrians. Crossings should be clearly sign posted with zigzag road markings and flashing amber beacons on approach. These signs warn drivers to reduce speed and prepare to give way to pedestrians. Further, provision of cross walks at roundabouts also increase safety and make it convenient for pedestrians to cross. Locating crosswalks a few metres away from the actual roundabout with a refuge in the splitter island enables pedestrians to cross in two stages, not both traffic streams at once (Department of Transport,

1995).

### Set mandatory speed limits

Without mandatory speed limits, motorists drive at whatever speed they please. This partly explains why far too many accidents occur on the roads. Setting legal speed limits with clear signs and penalties for lack of compliance may help to reduce speed related accidents.

### Improved driver training

There are far too many unqualified motorists in Port Moresby. The National Road Traffic Authority estimated the total cost of road accidents to range between K220million and K440 million per annum (The National, 2015:8). There are drivers who repeatedly break traffic rules, including driving through red lights, stopping at roundabouts, stopping at prohibited areas with hazard lights on, and conducting telephone conversations. These motorists are a danger to experienced law abiding motorists and the public.

A rigorous system of conducting driver training, testing and issuing of licenses, closely monitored and evaluated in a transparent manner, will produce better drivers and reduce the number of unnecessary accidents that occur on the roads.

### Public education and awareness

A public education and awareness program would encourage safe driving practices amongst motorists and responsible pedestrian behavior.

### Conclusion

Port Moresby's roads and streets are not complete, and therefore not pedestrian friendly. Giving priority to pedestrian safety concerns will mark the beginning of a new era of planning, engineering design and building of complete streets. This can provide an enabling environment that promotes and facilitates social and economic development activities. A commitment to develop complete streets will require a comprehensive approach with massive resource investments to ensure that pedestrian safety is provided on existing roads and accommodated in new infrastructure development projects. Ongoing engagement with stakeholders in discussions and incorporating their views and concerns would positively contribute to the provision of pedestrian friendly complete streets, towns and cities. Let us hope that our planners, en-

gineers, road transport and safety enforcement professionals are better informed and more responsive to ensuring pedestrian safety and convenience as 'we are all pedestrians at some point, everyday' (Allred, 2013:2).

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