

Commerce Ballarat statement RE: Bridge Street traffic flow

As we understand it, the Bakery Hill Urban Renewal Plan is a \$15million commitment from the City of Ballarat aimed at revitalising the Ballarat CBD, with an aim to address a decline in economic activity within the Bridge Mall precinct. A key component of this plan is to reopen the Bridge Mall to vehicular traffic, in an attempt to 'jump start' activity in the area. The recently released draft plan for this vehicle movement shows a single, east bound lane is the current Council 'preferred option'.

We note within Council's own Bakery Hill and Bridge Mall Precinct Urban Renewal Project documentation, the following is provided as a basis for the reopening of vehicular traffic to the Bridge Mall:

"This project involves opening the Bridge Mall to traffic and other users of the space to improve the movement network and restore its purpose as a key 'main street' destination within the Precinct and gateway to the City. Opening the mall is a very important project as a way to increase movement through the Precinct."

In essence, the projects aim was twofold:

1. Improve the network movement through the precinct; and
2. Restore Bridge Street as a key city gateway.

We submit that the decision to run with east bound vehicular movement within the Bridge Mall is fundamentally flawed and will ultimately result in changing the currently underutilised pedestrian mall into an underutilised roadway, completing missing the initial purpose of the Malls reopening.

A summary of our concerns regarding the 'gateway' component of the proposal is as follows:

1. The information provided suggests that the comparative dollar spend between residents of Ballarat and visitors to the City is \$3 to \$1, and that there are more Ballarat residents to the west of Bridge Mall. However, it is our view that it is highly unlikely that the populations to the west of Ballarat Central will change their shopping habits as a direct result of the Bridge Mall redevelopment.
2. The proposed redevelopment of the Bridge Mall provides no 'reason' for a resident on the western side of the City to traverse the Mall by car; there are limited car parking spaces, the mall is likely to be a 'shared space' meaning vehicle movement is likely to be slow, and the roadway, as proposed, does not 'lead' anywhere (but simply allows for a loop back around to Little Bridge Street). With a specific reason to traverse the Mall, and with local knowledge providing residents the knowledge of large, wide format car parks to the north and south of the mall, it is considered highly unlikely that local residents of Ballarat will see a need to drive through the Mall.
3. Residents of the western side of the city have a plethora of retail options far more easily accessible to them when considering Stockland Wendouree, Central Square, Delacombe Town Centre and other. The retail floorspace on offer to the west of Ballarat is substantial. Wendouree Major Activity Centre alone is larger than the Ballarat CBD Principal Activity Centre. When considering all retail outside of the CBD it is easy to see that the East of Ballarat is the area undersupplied with retail. The mall should be opened to traffic running east to west in order to accommodate these underserved areas.
4. When considering the retail hierarchy within Ballarat (defined with Councils own Ballarat Activity Centres Strategy of 2012) you can clearly see that the eastern side of Ballarat is underserved in terms of retail. This in turn will likely mean that the populations of Ballarat East (5,623people), Soldiers Hill (9,872people) and Golden Point/Mt Pleasant/Canadian (8,447ppl) are more likely to travel to the CBD to fulfill their retail needs than those residents to the west. The fact that these suburbs sit within a few kms of Ballarat Central makes this even more likely.

A summary of our concerns regarding the 'improved network' component of the proposal is as follows:

1. Orientating traffic flows within the Bridge Mall and allowing for westbound traffic (instead of the proposed east bound) would create a grander sense of arrival in to Ballarat rather than directing visitors through back streets. The grand boulevard of Sturt Street is one of Ballarat's most striking features and should be celebrated and promoted whenever possible. This links nicely with Councils continued support of protecting heritage within Ballarat.
2. Grenville street has been proposed to be closed to north-south traffic. Has any consideration been given to where this addition load on surrounding streets will be impacted? Will Dana and Eyre streets be upgraded to accommodate additional traffic loads? What is the intention for the additional pedestrian areas created by closing half of Grenville Street?
3. Traffic flow for eastbound vehicles through the mall is simply being diverted back through to Little Bridge Street. Improved network movement here appears to have been forgotten.
4. Will this plan ultimately divert more traffic from Sturt Street as all east bound traffic heading to Coles/Woolworths will need to either a) slowly traverse through a heavily pedestrianised mall and turn back or b) go via Dana Street as they are no longer able to go south on Grenville. Traffic volumes on Sturt Street are lower now following moves to make Dana and Mair more prominent potentially at the demise of retail on Sturt. Increased traffic flow, particularly on Dana Street, is likely to provide negative impacts on those areas, as well as negatively impacting existing retail trading on Sturt Street. Again, improved network movement here appears to have been forgotten.
5. Both Main Road and Bridge Mall will culminate at the same point on Little Bridge Street. The current proposal does not articulate how this junction will be treated.
6. How will access to Coles and Woolworths be managed? The imagery seems to have lost the vehicle access to the parking and there appears to be parking on the south side of Little Bridge Street, which will be at odds with bus movements. The final image shows access to the car park but the already heavily used pedestrian crossing has been moved away from the obvious desire line of its current alignment towards the supermarket.

The Urban Renewal Project, based on resident feedback, provides that the reopening of the Bridge Mall is aims are:

1. Improve the Movement Network
2. Adopting an inclusionary approach toward design of the street to balance the needs of all users of the space
3. Drawing Activity and movement into the street
4. Improving the amenity, safety, sense of place and identity in the street; and
5. Promoting awareness and visitation to the street

Refer to page 34 of the Bakery Hill and Bridge Mall Precinct Urban Renewal Project.

By providing vehicular movement east bound within the Bridge Mall, it is our view that the proposal as it stands misses all 5 points above.