



How transport impacts on wellbeing and liveability

In May 2019, the New Zealand Government produced its first wellbeing budget. Its intent was to move beyond a narrow focus on GDP and develop a broader understanding of what it means for a country to be successful.

This report explores the links between transport and wellbeing to support policies that improve the wellbeing of urban residents.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

There are three ways that transport initiatives impact wellbeing: mobility, built environment, and transport modes (the ways people get to places). When transport initiatives are structured around these factors, they are more likely to have the best outcome for users and their communities.

In this study, the main question researchers asked was 'How does transport affect individual or family wellbeing, and the liveability of different communities?' Five further questions were also asked to fill in the gaps.

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

Wellbeing has different meanings depending on the context. In this report, researchers used the 2019 definition from the New Zealand Treasury:

Wellbeing is when people are able to lead fulfilling lives with purpose, balance and meaning to them ... It means improving the state of our environment, the strength of our communities and the performance of our economy.

The researchers also considered the hauora principles of physical (tinana), mental and emotional (hinengaro), social (whanau) and spiritual (wairua) wellbeing.



1 How does transport affect individual or family wellbeing, and the liveability of different communities?



2 Are initiatives to encourage mode shift, reduce car dependence and reduce environmental impact of transport likely to increase wellbeing (and for whom) or reduce wellbeing (and for whom)?



3 If changes in transport arrangements reduce health and other costs from accidents or from the use of cars for transport, how should those savings be attributed to the transport sector (apart from specific projects)?



4 What are the most important variables to include in measures of liveability in New Zealand?



5 What transport changes provide the greatest improvements in wellbeing and liveability?



6 How should new policies or programmes address the link between transport interventions and wellbeing or liveability outcomes in their intervention logic?

WHAT HAVE WE ALREADY LEARNED ABOUT TRANSPORT AND WELLBEING?

The literature's conclusions on the links between transport and wellbeing are clear:

- Transport plays a significant role in people accessing work, services, recreation, community facilities, and their family and friends.
- The built environment and specific transport modes used also have a big impact on wellbeing.

But the links are not always straightforward. For example, private car use allows older people to be mobile and independent, which enhances their wellbeing. On the other hand, cars require enormous infrastructure, and transport corridors can literally divide communities. So, while car use benefits some people, it can also inhibit others from connecting. Car use also reduces wellbeing by contributing significantly to accidents and pollution.

It's well known that designing communities to encourage active transport modes, such as walking, has major benefits for physical health. Walking also improves social wellbeing by increasing interactions between residents. However, people may not walk out of choice – for example, poor single mothers may walk because there is no alternative, or they can't afford the alternative. For them, walking to the shops, doctors, or local playground, often with one or more children, can be stressful and doesn't necessarily contribute to hauora.

Research on transport modes confirms that increasing the use of public and active transport modes has a significant positive impact upon wellbeing. But only if

the modes help people to get to places they need to, affordably, safely and comfortably. Transport routes have usually focused on getting people to and from work. With wellbeing now a major focus, this pattern needs review.

WHAT IS LIVEABILITY?

Historically, liveability has referred mostly to the physical landscape, which is a significant contributor to wellbeing and a major focus for transport initiatives.

Liveability also refers to the environmental and social quality of an area as perceived by residents, employees, customers and visitors. This includes safety and health, local environmental conditions, the quality of social interactions, opportunities for recreation and entertainment, aesthetics, and existence of unique cultural and environmental resources.

Liveability highlights design of community spaces as having a big impact on transport modes and transport corridors. Understanding these links is important to get the most benefit from them.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS RESEARCH?

This study shows that transport initiatives can have a significant effect on wellbeing. Positive effects are clearest in the local transport initiatives that affect how people move around in their local community – not in large roading projects connecting our larger towns and cities. To have a positive impact on wellbeing and to address transport equity, the focus must be the local context. This means the transport sector working alongside people in their local communities when planning and implementing effective transport initiatives.



RR 669 – *Transport impacts on wellbeing and liveability*, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report. Available at www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/669