

City Hub Long Term Plan 2021-31

Frequently Asked Questions

The Location

Where is the Timaru City Hub?

The Timaru City Hub includes the area from Caroline Bay (including the Bay Hill and Piazza) down along Stafford Street and past the new Timaru Theatre Royal and Heritage Facility, stretching eastwards to the port and inland to State Highway One.

However, while major land marks and intersections might shape our everyday perception or experience of the City Hub, there are no hard boundaries from a strategic perspective. Council may consider projects on the fringe of or outside the described area where these are shown to be essential activity nodes or connections for the City Hub.

The Money

Why is this so expensive?

The proposed investment will be spent on capital works (roads, footpaths, lighting, signage, green spaces etc) to increase the functionality and amenity of the City Hub, ie to make it more user friendly, “greener” and more attractive. Some money will be spent on supporting events or experiences to “activate” special places and spaces.

A small portion of the funding will also be used to engage appropriate technical expertise in areas such as market research, urban design, engineering or traffic management solutions. This is essential to ensure that the chosen City Hub upgrades are properly aligned with the needs and wants of residents and visitors.

Can't we just leave it as it is?

No. It has been 25 years since the previous CBD refresh and ongoing maintenance and upgrading of public assets is important for Council to mitigate both the financial and the health and safety risks associated with degraded infrastructure. The time for re-investment is now, and with this re-investment comes the opportunity to make the City Hub a more accessible, desirable destination for all of the community.

Why is Council paying for this and not the land and building owners?

Land and building owners remain responsible for development and maintenance costs relating directly to their own properties. Council funding will be used to improve public

spaces and facilities that are the property of Council. We will work closely with the private sector to align timing so the work is coordinated across the City Hub area. This, together with increased private sector investment in enhanced commercial and/or residential opportunities, will improve the live, work, and play experience for all those who spend time in the city centre and as such will benefit the wider District.

Will any of this money be used to buy out land and building owners?

No. Council will only purchase land or buildings if there is a strategic need to convert those places to public use in order to realise community aspirations and achieve wellbeing outcomes for the City.

Will any of this money be used to subsidise earthquake strengthening or repairs to privately owned buildings?

Council does not have a general mandate to divert ratepayer funds towards private development interests. However, Council may have a strategic role to play in assisting affected building owners and tenants to navigate the complexity around earthquake strengthening and business displacement in order to encourage and facilitate private investment in the City Hub area.

At present Council provides a small amount of funding for heritage protection in acknowledgement of the restrictions placed on buildings identified within the District Plan as having heritage value. This is done in an effort to preserve, in particular, the façade and streetscape of the central business districts of the towns and townships (Timaru, Temuka, Pleasant Point and Geraldine). Preference is given to applications for work that gives greatest benefit to the public generally.

The Process

How is Council engaging with Mana Whenua?

The hapū who hold Mana Whenua in the Timaru District are Kāti Huirapa. The rohe of Kāti Huirapa extends over the area from the Rakaia River in the north to the Waitaki River in the south. The Papatipu Rūnanga that represents Kāti Huirapa is Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua.

A representative of Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua participates in the City Hub Steering Group which has been the governance group for the project to date. The Council will continue to engage with Mana Whenua through all future project steps.

How is Council engaging with key stakeholders?

The City Hub Steering Group has held a series of workshops with key CBD stakeholders. Their feedback has been used to produce a Strategic Stakeholder Report containing many interesting and exciting ideas for possible City Hub projects.

These ideas – and the issues identified by this group – will be carried forward into the design phase of this project. Council will continue to liaise with all those who have shared their valuable time and knowledge to date to encourage their continued involvement and feedback as the works programme evolves.

How does Council know what the community wants for the City Hub?

Because of the cost and comparatively permanent nature of urban design upgrades it is essential that we have an idea of what our people need and want from the Timaru City Hub to inform the development of our work programme. We want vibrant solutions that will improve your live, work, and play user experience in the city centre.

To this end, in December 2020 Council invited the community to submit ideas for the City Hub Strategy via a written form or verbal feedback to elected members and staff attending the Timaru Artisan Farmers Market. This feedback has been incorporated with the stakeholder feedback in the Strategic Stakeholder Report.

Council has also contracted a piece of market research to identify user needs and wants for the Timaru City Hub in the context of the wider District. This will capture feedback from a large, geographically and demographically diverse community. This Community Needs report will give us some reliable data around what our people want to do or to experience in the City Hub, how, when, where and why they want to do it, and how both the Council and other key stakeholders could help to realise these aspirations.

This report will also invite participants to prioritise and to explore trade-offs between the various issues and opportunities which they identify so that we can also get a sense of the areas in which Council or stakeholder activity/investment would have the biggest immediate impact for the most people. An example of such a “trade-off” conversation is around the prioritisation of vehicular vs pedestrian access and functionality, finding the right balance for now and for the future.

When will we see what this will look like, what Council is going to do?

Once the Community Needs Report has been finalised (together with the Strategic Stakeholder Report), and once a decision has been made on the level of funding that will be available for the City Hub, the City Hub Steering Group will be in a position to agree next steps and to confirm the project timeline to follow.

It is anticipated that this group might oversee multiple City Hub work-streams one of which will develop two or three design concepts for a refreshed City Hub aligned to the identified needs of our people and leveraging existing stakeholder project ideas and suggestions. These

City Hub concepts will be evaluated by Council staff to ensure that they are financially viable and complementary to our core work programmes before they are presented back to key stakeholders and the wider community for feedback. Other work streams may include topics such as heritage buildings and compliance, infrastructure renewals, cultural aspirations, accessibility, events, and place activation and these will also feed into the proposed design options.

If Council proceeds with either the preferred *Enabling* Option or the *Transform* Option then we expect to be seeking your feedback on possible design concepts towards the end of 2021.

Will we have a say in the final design and projects?

Yes. We anticipate a period of community engagement over the summer of 2021-22 when you will have an opportunity to see and to provide feedback on possible design concepts. At this point we will also be able to share indicative work programmes and costings for each design option to further inform your feedback.

When will Council start making these changes?

Following the completion of the necessary research and design work, and taking into account community feedback received, Council will present a draft City Hub Strategy – to include a preferred design and works programme proposal along with ongoing place activation – early in 2022. The final Strategy will then be adopted mid 2022 which will allow related planning, design and capital works to proceed.

It is important that the City Hub works programme be closely integrated with routine maintenance and upgrades of our three waters and land transport assets in order to minimise cost and disruption to the City Hub. Council will provide regular updates to affected stakeholders and the wider community as individual projects come ready for implementation.

Can't we just get on with something?

Yes! While it would be irresponsible for Council to invest significantly in major public assets without the appropriate user needs, urban design and technical information you will certainly not have to wait until 2022 to see some enlivening changes in our City Hub.

Drawing on the Stakeholder and Community Needs Reports, planning and engagement will continue throughout 2021 to activate the spaces we already love through, for example, trial traffic management scenarios, pop up places and event programmes. At every point on the journey we will be collecting your feedback on these activities to inform our final City Hub Strategy.

Risks and Issues

What about all the earthquake-prone buildings?

The legislative requirements under the Building Act require the Council to determine whether buildings in its District (in particular the CBD area) are earthquake-prone or not and we are well underway with these assessments. Many building owners within the CBD have already undertaken work to ensure that their buildings are compliant with the appropriate standards and others have plans in place to progress the necessary changes.

Should a building owner *not* carry out the seismic work on an earthquake-prone building then the council can make a decision on what to do with that building. This could include carrying out the required seismic work and billing the owner, keeping the building, or demolishing the building. Whichever option is preferred, Council remains in the decision making process for that building.

There are many factors that building owners may consider when deciding what to do with an earthquake-prone building however we as a community must recognise that a certain amount of change/progression in the CBD area is essential to ensure that this space stays relevant and provides value to everyone for the future.

What about other current and future retail developments? What about Showgrounds?

The City Hub Strategy is about reinventing a town centre which is currently a predominantly retail precinct as a vibrant mixed-use destination. It represents a special opportunity to offer our local people something more, a variety of live, work and play experiences which are both unique and complementary to the District's wider retail offering.

Economic reports commissioned by the Council (including the *Timaru Retail Market Assessment February 2015*, Property Economics for the Timaru District Council) show that there is consumer demand for a variety of retail offerings within the Timaru District with spending directed to everything from boutique to supermarket shopping.

While net leakage from the District is negligible (residents' out of District spend is roughly equivalent to visitors' in town spend) there are particular areas – such as clothing and footwear – in which a large percentage of local consumers have historically been going outside of our District to find what they need.

The recently approved Showgrounds development will, together with our other Town Centres in Geraldine, Temuka and Pleasant Point, and with our other Timaru retail developments such as Highfield Mall, Northtown Mall and the Warehouse precinct, align well with this user demand for retail variety and help us to retain local spend within our District.

Against that wider context, the City Hub Strategy will support the development of the City Hub as the heart of the District, a lifestyle destination where shopping is just one of a variety of desirable activities and experiences on offer.

The Showgrounds proposal does reinforce the need for the City Hub area to take control of the present, reinvest in the future and create a great experience for all people.