

School Building for Transport Safety; Spotlight on Educational Designation



Safekids Discussion Document

Tuesday, 29 November 2005

Summary

Educational Designation is a special process in the Resource Management Act 1991 to facilitate rapid and smooth resource consent procedures for the development of educational buildings and new schools.

However this process may be leaving new schools and Boards of Trustees with unresolved transport safety issues around their schools, putting students at risk and resulting in the need for later, and more expensive, remedial infrastructural works.

Safekids asks;

- Is transport safety advice desired, required, or available for Boards of Trustees and the Ministry of Education at the concept stage of school building projects?
- When new educational facilities are about to be built, are transport safety issues for the school and its surrounds reliably and adequately considered during the Educational Designation negotiations between territorial authorities and the Ministry of Education or its agents?
- Are Transport Safety impacts on local and regional road networks evaluated and reported following educational building development?

Safekids suggests;

- Transport Safety objectives are included as an integral part of the planning and consent processes in the development of new educational facilities and buildings.
- Transport Safety expertise in the provision of educational services is identified and available to educational institutions and territorial authorities at the time they are planning and negotiating consent for educational buildings or building extensions.
- Transport Safety outcomes are included in evaluation processes of new educational buildings and facilities.

1. *Transport issues at the Planning Stage*

Building or planning a new school, or new school buildings, is a mammoth task. Immediately a new school is proposed many issues crowd in and arrest the attentions of the Ministry of Education Property Department and Establishment Boards of Trustees.

Transport safety is often raised at this early stage. Local communities care about transport safety for their new schools. A recent Ministry of Education School Building Review (2005) cited comments from community consultation where a new secondary school was to be built "Safety is a key issue in many areas around the school. Road safety was the most often

discussed safety issue and participants had real concerns about traffic engineering solutions to current school traffic problems” (p5).

Another early job is to secure all necessary planning and consent approvals. However as soon as this is achieved, and even before, the school governance team needs to focus on internal issues, appointments of key staff members, facilities needed within the school, the curriculum and many others.

Issues around the location of the school in its neighbourhood and its network of roads quickly pale into something that needs to be dealt with and ‘out of the way’ early. Very soon there is little energy left within the school management team for concern about where local bus stops are, or how many parking spaces need to be provided.

Another factor is that Territorial Authorities can have mixed objectives around school transport issues. There is a well signalled government intention to promote the use of public transport. However this comes into direct conflict with a need to ensure there is adequate on campus parking for new schools or school extensions.

Local communities see the provision of on campus parking as the solution to congested local street parking. Others see the provision of parking as a disincentive for public transport use or walking. Without prompt resolution, Boards of Trustees may be ‘caught in the middle’ of a debate they would not naturally seek.

Overall, despite community concern about transport safety, in school building processes there is a great deal of pressure to minimise and move away from transport issues early and quickly.

Unfortunately this has not always provided the best transport safety results.

2. Educational Designation

To facilitate the Resource Consent task, a process exists referred to as an Educational Designation. Whenever the Ministry plans to build new educational facilities they, or their agents, undertake a negotiated process of application to the relevant territorial authority. This application is a provision under Part 8 of the Resource Management Act (1991).

This also applies to building alterations. The Resource Management Act (1991) provides that if an alteration to a designation meets the criteria set out in section 181 (3), then the alteration to the designation can be made without the formal processes of notification and submissions required for a new designation.

The Ministry of Education has a strong legislative imperative for the use of land; however in this process the territorial authority has the capacity to require considerations from the applicant, which is either a Board of Trustees, or the Ministry. There are potentially many Territorial Authorities and many different Boards of Trustees and Ministry of Education agents involved and such considerations, and requirements, vary widely.

In some situations conditions are focussed around the physical design of the buildings and immediate road environment outside the school. However as transport safety issues do not need to be taken into account, conditions may be of any nature, such as the preservation of local vegetation or building character requirements.

Many schools are aware of the need to consider transport safety in their building projects. However transport safety is not part of a school’s core competence. Schools rely upon Territorial Authorities to provide expertise about their local network.

Even if the Territorial Authority designations consent procedure usually provides opportunity for transport comment, building educational facilities can be a relatively rare event and specialist experience of the requirements of educational traffic may not be available within the consenting Territorial Authority, and difficult to locate.

3. School Building and Transport - Examples

Despite the best effort of all concerned during the school building process, there are examples of lost opportunities to over-come traffic safety issues in partnership with Territorial Authorities, prior to building.

One newly built High School needed to fundraise for the installation of traffic lights to allow pedestrian access across a highway with 70km speed limit.

Another newly established primary school zone included a section of land that would not have direct road access to the school for at least four to five years, forcing families to drive more than 5kms to get to school when they lived less than 1k away.

These efforts distracted these school communities from their much needed focus on the educational outcomes for their pupils. Improvements in transport safety planning systems, resources, and support during negotiations in the early stages of these school projects may have avoided these situations.

4. Recommendations

Safekids proposes that the Educational Designation process is a window of opportunity to achieve improved school transport safety.

Community dissatisfaction with transport and road safety issues provides a significant distraction from the focus needed to develop and deliver top quality educational services. Further, retrofitting engineering solutions to school transport problems is expensive, time consuming and sometimes almost impossible.

Territorial authorities usually welcome and value the establishment of schools in their areas of residential growth. If territorial authorities and agents of the Ministry of Education collaboratively consider transport safety within the designation process, a partnership relationship between the TLA and the Ministry to resolve issues would be sought more consistently than at present.

Including transport Safety in school planning would help to achieve national consistency of standard in the design of new facilities and develop expertise in the consideration of Transport Safety features when planning for new educational facilities.

Safekids suggests and recommends that;

- Transport Safety objectives are included as an integral part of the planning and consent processes in the development of new educational facilities and buildings.
- Transport Safety expertise in the provision of educational services is identified and available to educational institutions and territorial authorities at the time they are planning and negotiating consent for educational buildings or building extensions.
- Transport Safety outcomes are included in evaluation processes of new educational buildings and facilities.

Proactively considering transport safety objectives within the early planning and Educational Designation process for new educational facilities makes sense. It is "school travel planning in advance". This is not proposed as a panacea for all educational traffic woes of the future, but it will help.

Julie Chambers
Safekids Senior Policy Analyst