Potential of an Active Transport Corridor Along Christchurch’s Earthquake Damaged Avon-Otakaro River

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Background

As a result of the 2010/11 Canterbury Earthquakes, one of the most badly damaged parts of Christchurch was along the banks of the Avon-Otakaro River (main map, right). The land has been designated uneconomic to rebuild on and acquired by the government. The development of a walking and cycling corridor along the river is a popular idea that is part of the redevelopment plans.

Project Aim

This poster presents the findings of research that was undertaken to identify potential users and level of use, purpose, key destinations, preferred design features and likely social impacts of the trail, along with the importance of linkages with other pathways.

Method

A number of interviews and focus groups were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders including representatives from the local Business Association, Heritage Association, Residents Association, cycle advocates, school, shopping mall, disability support group, a young mothers group, and a walking group as well as Christchurch City Council staff.

Features that may have the greatest impact on future usage, including key destinations in the immediate vicinity, connectivity, linkages with other council pathways, track quality, supporting infrastructure, and future commercial opportunities were identified.

A visual investigation of the relevant areas was conducted to identify the potential strengths and weaknesses of the trail. This coupled with interview responses was used to produce digital maps of the area using ArcGIS showing key destinations (Fig. 1) and possible connections (Fig. 2).

Results

The trail is likely to be popular among recreational cyclists, and for travel to school. The research sheds light on other potential user groups, features and facilities considered desirable by potential users, physical limitations of the land and likely social and economic benefits and disadvantages of the route.

It is recommended that facilities that promote safety are prioritised during the design phase, including making it off-road, where possible providing separation between walkers and cyclists and reducing the number of traffic crossings. Barriers to maximising use were also identified and included safety, access, marketing, financial support, and effective segregation of competing user groups.

The pathway displays many potential benefits for the Christchurch community. However, there are extensive limitations and careful planning is required to address earthquake damage, and produce a standard of facility desired by stakeholders and potential user groups.