



## Urban Design – Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What does urban design mean for the NZTA?

Urban design is an approach that manages the NZTA's responsibilities in built and natural environments. It manages each activity within its context to integrate economic, engineering, environmental and social requirements to provide a context sensitive approach.

### 2. Why adopt an urban design approach at the NZTA?

Urban design provides a context sensitive approach to planning and designing state highways and other transport networks that best meet the economic, environmental, social and engineering requirements of an area. Using this multidisciplinary technique contributes to the objectives of the Land Transport Management Act, the New Zealand Transport Strategy, the Resource Management Act and the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol, to which the NZTA is a signatory.

Transport influences the form, function and well being of communities. A context sensitive approach to the location and design of road corridors, public transport networks and pedestrian and cycle facilities should integrate into the built and natural environment and allow for a more sustainable form of development.

### 3. What are good urban design outcomes?

Each project has different constraints and design outcomes, but there are several common features the NZTA seeks:

*Simplicity:* The best designs are often the simplest and neatest solution to a given issue. Complexity usually results from a poor quality, compartmentalised design process. It can also be expensive to build and maintain.

*Functionality:* Urban design is concerned with infrastructure that works well and looks good. Good design must be functional and fulfil the NZTA's safety and engineering standards but also contribute to the local way of life and protect the natural environment. For example:

- a beautiful but unused pedestrian bridge is not good urban design;
- a path or underpass that is secluded and perceived to be unsafe is not good urban design; and



- a leafy landscape or grassed berm in an urban area that requires very high maintenance is not good urban design.

Good urban design solutions therefore consider safety and maintenance functions, durability, ability to replace and repair and long term aesthetics (i.e graffiti and weathering).

*Consistency:* Consistency in urban design terms implies different elements should be related to each other (form, material and detail). For the NZTA, consistency and quality in road furniture and safety and design elements should be achieved within the overall design. A lack of consistency can be distracting and misleading to road users and can be unnecessarily expensive.

*Value for Money:* Urban design associated with transport must not represent an extravagant use of public funds. In order to help ensure value for money all costs and benefits need to be identified and justified. An optimal urban design outcome requires consideration of affordability and therefore costs that do not deliver significant benefits should be avoided. When considering costs and benefits it is important to take a broad view and consider “whole of life” costs; and economic, social and environmental costs and benefits that accrue in both the short and long term.

#### **4. How is urban design achieved?**

Urban design is achieved by ensuring that the needs of the transport user, community, natural environment and the built environment are balanced and considered in a collaborative, multi disciplinary way, from the start of the planning and design process.

#### **5. Does urban design mean iconic?**

An urban design outcome might be iconic in rare cases of political or national merit such as a large bridge, however, the vast majority of good design outcomes must be practical and appropriate – not iconic.

#### **6. Is urban design applicable in rural areas?**

Urban design is applicable everywhere there is development ie. rural and coastal areas, towns and cities.

However, the considerations in a highly populated area can be quite different from those in rural, coastal and mountainous areas. Transport networks beyond urban environments should fit with the character of the area. This may be achieved for instance by blending the highway into the landscape, providing grassed berms in farming areas, ensuring cuttings and structures reflect New Zealand's biodiversity in sensitive areas, maintaining good views and carefully locating signage.

## 7. How does the project team relate to urban design?

As urban design is a holistic approach to development, it must fully embrace the skills of all relevant professionals. These include planners and environmental managers who set the broad framework, civil engineers, architects and landscape architects who shape the project into a coherent design; to ecologists, noise consultants, archaeologists and other experts who advise on design.



Roads and Traffic Authority "Beyond the Pavement", 2000

## 8. What is the relationship between urban design and state highway categorisation?

The categorisation of the state highway network reflects the different primary functions of different state highways (National, Regional or Sub-Regional) and the different environments through which they pass (urban, peri-urban or rural). This enables the NZTA to take a context-sensitive approach (rather than 'one size fits all') to planning and managing the state highways and is therefore an important method by which the NZTA meets its obligations under the Urban Design Protocol. In the context of projects this means it is important to consider the category of state highway involved and ensure the outcomes are consistent with that category.

## 9. Is urban design expensive?

Adopting an urban design approach has cost benefits if integrated into the planning and design process from the start. By using land use planning to help achieve urban design outcomes, the need for mitigation measures can be reduced if identified and considered early on in route selection and alignment. Good urban design advice can also reduce consenting timeframes and long term maintenance costs.



#### **10. When should urban design be considered?**

In order to influence the physical design direction of a project, urban design must be addressed in the early planning stages. An urban design approach has the greatest influence and is highly cost effective when applied in the planning stages of a project.

It must be continued through all subsequent stages of design, and then finally monitored so that the desired outcomes are delivered.

#### **11. Is it ever too late to consider urban design?**

No. However it does become more difficult and typically more expensive the later it is left.

#### **12. How far should urban design go?**

There are benefits for the NZTA in taking urban design “beyond the pavement”. However, in doing this, the NZTA initiatives in urban design are best done collaboratively with local authorities and stakeholders to ensure there is a consistent urban design direction and community acceptance of the approach.

#### **13. What is the role of the NZTA's Urban Design Team at National Office?**

The role of the Urban Design Team is to promote urban design initiatives, develop policy and guidance and provide support and assistance to project teams to help ensure urban design is appropriately integrated into the NZTA's business. The Urban Design Team is working with the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry for the Environment to ensure consistency within the transport sector.

#### **14. How to contact the NZTA's Urban Design Team?**

You can contact Jacque Bell on (04) 894 64 23 or email [jacque.bell@nzta.govt.nz](mailto:jacque.bell@nzta.govt.nz) and we'll be happy to help.