

The Truth That Makes Us Safer

An Open Letter to Auckland Transport and the Waiheke Local Board

I am concerned with the recent centre line painting on Wilma Road. As a local resident, I ride and walk my children to school there very regularly. I drive it too. I describe it as “shared environment”. We all use the narrow road space and as drivers, we locals are aware of the high regularity we will meet active users- walkers, joggers, horse riders and cyclists, around one of those bends.

To make things clear, I am not advocating for the road to be widened or for footpaths or cycle lanes here, at least not past Dickson Rd. Those thousands of dollars would be wiser spent elsewhere and deprive Waiheke of one of its best remaining rural character roads. No, I would rather we carried on sharing with grace.

Since the line painting however, I have concluded that this is now harder. Vehicle speeds appear to have increased and outside the car, I feel we are more vulnerable. Interestingly, inside it I feel more comfortable with my speed and the formality of the road.

I believe this is because the lines set up an unrealistic expectation of a clear lane ahead. This “false sense of security” is a dangerous thing, because it is rarely so. We are in fact regularly required to cross the centre line to pass slower active users and the last thing we need coming at us then, is a secure and over confident driver, going too fast to avoid a head on collision.

I understand that some may be surprised by the fuss over “just a few paint lines” but I would ask you to walk the road now. When you are there, every little thing needs to help you.

I also understand that the previous near invisible lines, could have understandably been seen, by a conscientious asset manager to be in need of replacement. So lets not make this a personal attack on them.

However, I do believe we should now assess the outdated paradigm that was nicely fading away up until a few weeks ago. AT and the local board are apparently relying heavily on “shared space” design to keep all users of a reopened Esplanade safe and happy, (if not out of pocket and covered in dust). If so, it is surely critical for AT to get shared space right where there is already undeniable and necessary car use.

I understood that best practice in “shared space” design is critically built on a sense of “ambiguity” to encourage slower speeds. That sense of discomfort and “edge” we drivers feel is the truth that makes us safer.

Wilma Road before the line painting was more “self-explaining”. It “told” you the conditions are complex and you should drive to them. Most drivers were highly considerate because of this. They understood (and thankfully some still do) that the road was saying “slow down you are here and so are those more vulnerable than you”.

Wilma Roads, ditches, narrow bends and overhanging trees all send those messages. However, the new line markings attempt to create structure and regulation that in truth, cant be achieved (nor should it in my view) without massive engineering investment.

The centre lines try to make the road something that it is not. From a rural single lane road with passing places into a fully-fledged two-lane road. I believe this is fighting the roads natural sense of place, sending all the wrong messages and making the vulnerable more so.

I respectfully ask to meet with Local Board representatives and an AT officer who has training and experience in shared space design. Afterwards, I hope that any other interested local residents can be involved in a discussion about the issues: That we can then jointly consider an improved set of asset management guidelines for Wilma Rd.

I believe AT needs to set a more appropriate level of service for the road, one that works with its character instead of against it and focuses primarily on the needs of the vulnerable. I believe this is best achieved through road design that encourages vehicle speeds of less than 30K/hr. I don't believe that will cost thousands of dollars.

However, those are just my personal views, I am sure there are others out there too. I now hope that the Local Board and AT can begin to facilitate this important community discussion. We have many other roads just like Wilma. Many are key assets to our tourism revenue and "Waiheke feel" culture.

Regards,

Tom Ransom 14 Hillside Rd, Ostend Tel 3723215