



ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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FAITH AND UNITY
Whakapono me Kotahitanga

30th June 2011

Auckland Transport
NZ Police
Auckland Council – Community Transport

cc:

Hon Allan Peachey, MP for Tamaki
Cameron Brewer, Councillor for Orakei Ward, Auckland City
Ngati Whatua o Orakei Trust Board
The Catholic Schools Office
Ministry of Education
Housing New Zealand
Auckland Council – Road Safety

Traffic dangers – Brenton Place/Kepa Road to Kepa Road pedestrian crossing

To the recipients of this letter,

My name is John Williams and I am the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees for St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Orakei. I am writing to you to obtain your agreement for actions to alleviate a most dangerous traffic situation for our school. Parents and Staff, and I personally, have witnessed many incidents where people in the St Joseph's community have been seriously at risk, and I fear it is only a matter of time before one of our people is injured in a traffic accident. **Urgent action** is needed to address the conditions which are creating this risk, and the school needs your help in parallel with the actions we ourselves are taking.

Background – St Joseph's School Orakei:

We are a small primary school located at the end of Brenton Place, a short street which intersects with Kepa Road, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the Eastern Suburbs. Our roll has been steady at approximately 80 children for many years, but recent improvements in the school have seen our roll increase substantially. We now have 110 children at school, and expect to finish the year with 121. Our maximum approved roll is 125, and we expect to reach this number in 2012. The theoretical site capacity is 200, and the School Board is keen to pursue approval for a roll increase within the next 12-24 months.

This growth has been very positive for the school, but one consequence is greatly increased traffic volumes, particularly for after school pick-up. The school has undertaken several strategies to mitigate the risks associated with this – which I will review later – but the increased pedestrian use of Kepa Road, and the increased number of cars that spill over into Kepa Road, have both now reached the point where I am convinced that this is a situation waiting for a disaster to happen.

Significant risks – intersection Brenton Place/Kepa Rd to Kepa Rd pedestrian crossing:

There are many aspects which combine to make this a high risk area. Firstly, the physical aspects of the roads create a risky environment:

1. The narrowness of Brenton Place and the parking of residents' cars on the street means Brenton Place cannot support 2-way traffic - thus making a continuous tight queue of cars for after school pickup impossible.
2. The short length of Brenton Place (approx 60m) means we cannot fit many cars on that street; this inevitably puts additional vehicles in harms way as they slow, stop and turn within the context of the heavy traffic flow on Kepa Road.
3. The entrance to Brenton Place is partially obscured for traffic heading towards the City because of the crest in Kepa Road 55-60 metres short of the entrance, the downhill camber of Kepa Road, the fact that Brenton Place is a narrow street, the lack of warning signs, and the trees and fences near the verge.
4. The pedestrian crossing just before the crest of the hill and the traffic island adjacent to the intersection with Coates Ave force traffic heading towards the City left into one tight lane only 55 metres short of Brenton Place, heightening the danger to cars slowing down or potentially stopping for a short time to assess whether they can enter Brenton Place given the build-up of the queue.
5. There is no separate lane to turn right into Brenton Place for traffic heading away from the City - so traffic sits in the painted median area - with a clear risk that traffic coming towards them may veer out to avoid Brenton Place traffic.
6. The pedestrian crossing is located shortly after the crest of the hill (heading away from the City), making it difficult to see and anticipate. There is also the intersection of Coates Avenue, which can divert driver attention. To the East of the crossing, heading into the City, it is common for traffic on Kepa Road to be joined by cars exiting the Shell petrol station, and merging from the road slipway from Kupe Street. This merging occurs in the middle of the road, and immediately before the pedestrian crossing, so no signs warning of the crossing will be visible for those vehicles. Driver concentration is on other cars, not pedestrians. As a result, it is not uncommon for cars to go through the crossing at speed despite there being pedestrians waiting there.

Furthermore, in wet weather - a time when the traffic at the school is much higher - the risk factors are compounded by poor visibility and slippery roads. To which we must add the further risks of heavy vehicle traffic, and greater numbers of cars of parents collecting their children from the other schools in the vicinity (due to the wet). And finally, the proposed development at Orakei Point will add 700 homes/apartments and retail/office space, thus producing increased traffic volumes and risks to the immediate area.

The simple physics of vehicle stopping are also relevant. Driver reaction time is normally reckoned at 1.5 seconds - so at 50kmph, a vehicle on a dry road will travel 21m before the driver reacts, then take another 14-15m to stop. On a wet road with poor visibility it will take both longer to react and stop – perilously close to the maximum 55m distance available (between the crest of the hill and the Brenton/Keba intersection). With heavier vehicles the stopping distance required will be greater. Combined with the physical characteristics of the roads (above), these simple matters of physics represent a serious risk to traffic using this intersection.

School responses to these risk factors:

The school has been aware of these risks for some time, and we have regularly inserted items in newsletters alerting our community to the issues. We have requested that parents do not turn right when exiting Brenton Place, have encouraged use of the walking school bus (with supervision), and have asked that parents wait to collect their children on the other side of Keba Road (staff escort children to and across the pedestrian crossing).

This has been effective in slowing the increase of vehicles arriving in Brenton Place to collect children, but it has resulted in more children walking along and across Keba Road. It is now not unusual for 30% of the children on our roll, along with their bags, guitars, scooters and bikes, to walk together along Keba Road to use the pedestrian crossing. This activity is in itself risky for many reasons – the pavement is narrow, there are no barriers, supervision of that many children is not straight-forward, the traffic is relatively heavy and fast-moving, visibility (as noted above) is restricted, and there are many issues making the pedestrian crossing risky (as above). It is also important that, unlike many schools, this pedestrian crossing is not adjacent to school property, making monitoring of the crossing more difficult.

The school has requested assistance from agencies such as yours to mitigate the risks, with generally limited success. I will review these aspects later.

Thus whilst our strategies relating to school traffic have worked to some extent, there has been a corresponding shift in risks to the children as pedestrians. Further, these strategies have not fully offset our growth, and clearly they are less effective in wetter weather.

Despite the risk factors, and the school's mitigating actions, parents in cars obviously make their own decisions as to where they choose to wait and how they drive, and the school has no authority over their behaviour outside the school gate. The Board has concluded that if we cannot rely on parents to act as we request, and as road markings require, then action must be taken in knowledge of this. As a result, the Board has decided that escalation of risk avoidance and mitigation strategies is essential to protect the community from risks arising from this environment.

Our escalation strategies:

The school is adopting four broad strategies in an effort to more comprehensively mitigate these risks:

1. Reduce the size of the risk by continuing to encourage existing well-established practices which do not involve parents collecting children from school grounds. E.g. walking school bus, collection at the church, walking/biking home together, etc. However, the Board recognises that these will not be especially effective in winter.
2. Promote better driver behaviour by escalating information and education about the traffic risks and appropriate behaviour (e.g. not turning right out of Brenton, waiting until there is a clear space on Brenton, waiting on Nehu St (opposite Brenton), etc). This will include more items in newsletters, flyers handed out to parents in the pick-up queue, and a possible school-wide road safety week (possibly extending to residents and the local newspaper).
3. Reduce the number of cars (and therefore people) at risk by changing our on-site queuing practices and investing in school property so we can get more cars on the site. There are various limitations with the layout of the site and complexities with land ownership, but we have identified a strategy which should allow us to get an additional 10-15 cars queued on site. The school will draw significantly on our own cash and equity to make these improvements, since we do not believe we will be able to secure any grant money to defray this expense.
4. Draw the attention of relevant agencies to the risks, issues and opportunities for improving the physical characteristics of the roads just outside the school, and thus further mitigate the risks. You have received this letter because you are one such agency, and we are looking to you to contribute to improving safety in this area within your sphere of responsibility.

External agency support:

As a small school we do not have the resources to identify and pursue the specific individuals in the various institutions who may be able to assist us – but your agency has received this letter because these issues have been drawn to the attention of your agency within the past few years; for example, in relation to Walking School Bus Safety, introduction of traffic speed moderation signs (to 40 kpmh) at school start and finish times, road markings, rubbish removal, road widening, tree trimming and pavement maintenance, etc.

I have reviewed the correspondence the school has received on these matters and generally I have found the responses disappointing. For example:

- The school requested a 40kpmh traffic moderation sign, but was initially told that a sign would not be provided because there were too few students at the school. The logic of this argument completely eludes me; does this mean the wellbeing of a child in a large school is more important?
- We were then promised the 40kpmh sign in the 2010/2011 year, but we have now been told that it will be installed in the 2011/2012 year. Again, disappointing given we are in a high risk time of the year, and there is as yet no certainty of installation.

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- We requested pedestrian safety railings along the side of the road to reduce the risk to children walking along the narrow footpath of Kepa Road approaching the zebra crossing, but have been told:
 - in 2010 – beside the cost of installation, that they were not necessary because the children were appropriately supervised/controlled on their journey, and further that railings would not prevent a car from mounting the pavement and potentially killing the children. However:
 - How exactly will supervision help the children in the event that a vehicle strays onto the footpath?
 - Railings enhance safety on many NZ roads; surely appropriate railings could sourced and installed!
 - Railings would also help prevent a child from falling into the road and being hit by an on coming car, and therefore would be valuable.
 - in 2011 - that they will not be installed because of the risk of flying debris should a car strike them. If that is the case, why are safety railings installed at all on any of our roads? Surely they can be constructed with suitable robustness!
 - The school has requested that action be taken to stop Housing NZ residents parking on the verge on the Kepa/Brenton Place corner because cars parked there obscure on-coming down-hill traffic, and we have correspondence which promises random traffic wardens to do spot checks and issue fines etc. This may or may not be occurring, but it is evident that the illegal parking remains a daily occurrence.

The school has a very real concern about the safety of the people in our community. We are taking actions, within our control, to reduce or mitigate the risks. But we cannot do this by ourselves. We need your assistance to implement a range of changes within your control, and contribute to improving the safety of our young people and their caregivers. I am convinced that your agencies can collectively serve the school far better than these rather disappointing responses indicate.

External agency commitments received:

I am aware that some commitments to assist us have been made; for example, the installation of the 40kpmh traffic moderation system; visits by maintenance teams; trimming of trees; repainting of Kepa Road pedestrian crossing white lines; and random visits by parking wardens. However, collectively these commitments fall short of what we expect from your agencies considering what we believe to be necessary if the risks are to be properly mitigated. We would welcome a visit from you to review the situation, and to identify actions which you think would improve the safety of this area.

Strategies and actions which the Board considers important:

To start the process, the Board and Staff have identified a number of actions which we think would be far more effective in mitigating these risks, including:

1. Immediately and urgently reprioritise installation of our promised school traffic lights (40kmph limit at school closure times) for the month of July.
2. Install enhanced and highly visible signage and road markings either side of the Kapa Road pedestrian crossing to warn traffic – particularly at school start and end times. There are signs in place at present, but in some cases they are obscured, and the complexity of the intersections around the crossing makes this a high risk facility. Consider making this crossing subject to a light.
3. Install a warning sign on the side of Kapa Rd to supplement the existing yellow dotted lines and clearly confirm that parking on the side of the road is not an option.
4. Install a warning sign to alert drivers heading towards the City that there is a street with obscured access on the left.
5. Remove the tree on the verge immediately uphill from the Brenton/Kapa intersection to improve visibility for cars exiting Brenton, and improve visibility for cars on Kapa.
6. Install barriers between the road and the footpath from the Brenton/Kapa intersection to the pedestrian crossing.
7. Install "no right turn" signs at the end of Brenton Place (particularly Monday to Friday, between the hours of 8:15-9:15 and 2:45 to 3:15).
8. In concert with the scheduled footpath upgrade on Brenton Place (which we understand is planned for 2011/2012), take the opportunity to widen the 60m length of Brenton Place by a mere 2 metres – thereby allowing 2-way traffic. The existing "no parking" signs/markings on one side of Brenton Place should be retained.
9. Schedule police or community constable presence between 2:45-3:15 on weekdays to support proper and safe traffic behaviours.
10. Change the traffic flows on Kapa Rd and enhance the right turn lane into Brenton Place (i.e. heading up the hill) to improve safety of those in vehicles waiting to turn.

The staff you send to visit us may well have further ideas – we would welcome any contribution to improving the safety here, and consider that your collective expertise may provide solutions which either the school or individual agencies may not identify.

Conclusions:

I hope and pray that an unthinkable tragedy does not befall one of our community as they negotiate this area in pursuit of their children's education, but the combination of circumstances I have outlined cause me to fear for the worst. The school is committed to strong actions to mitigate these risks – but we desperately need your support.

Accordingly, I would hope to receive a meaningful response from you on this as a matter of priority, and that you will recognise the seriousness of the situation and provide clear action commitments. The Board looks forward to receiving such responses from you within the next few weeks.

In support of this letter, **we are making ourselves available at 2:30pm on Friday 8th July at the School to receive representatives from your agencies** so that you can view the issues for yourselves, and possibly discuss concerns with myself, staff and parents. This may also encourage exchange of ideas between agencies, so that an holistic response can be developed. We will be there rain or shine, so please do consider sending someone to review the situation.

If you wish to visit the school, please make contact with the Principal, Kathryn Hira, at the contact numbers above. I very much look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

John Williams
Chairperson, Board of Trustees
St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Orakei

Addressees:

Auckland Transport – Ms Darsha Patel, Customer Response Team
NZ Police – Constable Peter Hoskyn, Youth Education Services
Auckland Council – Mr Stephen Lindfield, Community Transport Leader, Central

cc:

Hon Allan Peachey, MP for Tamaki
Cameron Brewer, Councillor for Orakei Ward, Auckland City
Ngati Whatua – Mr Grant Hawke, Chairperson of Ngati Whatua o Orakei Trust Board
Catholic Schools Office – Br Sean Hanaray, Manager Property and Finance
Ministry of Education – Ms Anthea Morell, Property Manager
Housing New Zealand – Ms Pam Robinson, Tenancy Manager
Auckland Council – Ms Karen Hay, Road Safety Manager