

SUBMISSION ON ALBANY STREET CONNECTION PROJECT – PARKING RESTRICTIONS (JULY–AUGUST 2025)

From the Otago University Students' Association

Introduction

We write to express our support for the overarching goals of the Albany Street Connection project while raising serious concerns about some aspects of the current parking restriction proposals. We believe in building a city that is sustainable, inclusive, and accessible to all, and that means balancing infrastructure improvements with the lived realities of Dunedin's student population.

Students make up a significant portion of the inner-city and North Dunedin population, with tens of thousands living, studying, working, and volunteering in the area affected by this project. Albany Street is one of the most heavily used corridors by students, and any transport, streetscape, or urban development proposal must therefore carefully consider its impacts on student life, affordability, and equitable access.

We acknowledge and appreciate the intent behind this project. Enhancing pedestrian and cyclist safety, improving connectivity between the tertiary area and the central city, and supporting a low-emissions transport future are goals that align with broader climate and urban resilience strategies. We also recognise the importance of encouraging mode shift as part of national and local efforts to meet emissions targets and improve wellbeing.

However, these goals must not come at the expense of essential public access, nor should they deepen existing inequalities. The design and rollout of urban infrastructure must consider both current users and future aspirations. We are concerned that aspects of this project do not adequately reflect the lived experience of students and may lead to increased costs, stress, and displacement for those already struggling with housing, transport, and living costs.

We urge the Council to ensure that the voices of students are taken seriously in this consultation and that final design choices reflect a strong commitment to affordability, access, and community wellbeing.

Support for Modal Shift and Public Realm Improvements

We support the overall direction of the Albany Street Connection project, particularly its emphasis on making active and public transport safer and more accessible. Investments in raised pedestrian crossings, separated cycleways, bus stop upgrades, and visual enhancements to the street corridor are long overdue. Albany Street is central to the student experience in Dunedin. It links residential flats, lecture halls, libraries, cafes, and clubs, and is a corridor where students walk, bike, and gather daily.

The proposed changes will reduce conflicts between modes, especially between cyclists and heavy traffic. In recent years, there have been growing concerns about near misses and a lack of protection for cyclists along this route. Students are some of the most frequent riders in the city, and they often cycle on tight schedules or under pressure. Creating safe, continuous cycleways is not only a matter of sustainability but also one of public safety.

We also welcome the raised courtesy crossings and narrowed intersections. These features will make it safer for pedestrians crossing busy side streets and reduce the speed of vehicles in what is fundamentally a residential and educational area. The more the street environment is

designed for people rather than cars, the more welcoming and accessible it becomes for those who do not or cannot drive.

We also acknowledge and appreciate the inclusion of new trees in parts of the design. Green infrastructure has many benefits beyond aesthetics, from managing stormwater to improving mental health and providing shade. In a climate-challenged world, streets that combine transport function with environmental resilience must become the norm. However, as outlined later, we are concerned that this benefit is undermined by the removal of mature trees elsewhere in the project.

While we applaud this shift in vision, we caution that mode shift must be implemented in a way that brings the community with it. Students cannot be expected to absorb the costs of this transition on their own, especially when many are already facing high rents, food insecurity, and precarious work. Good urban design includes social equity at its core, and we hope the Council will reflect that in its decisions.

Concerns about Reduction of Unrestricted Parking

We are seriously concerned about the scale and nature of parking changes proposed as part of this project. While the introduction of nine new short-term carparks near the University Library is noted, this does not meaningfully compensate for the substantial loss of unrestricted or flexible-duration parking throughout the Albany Street corridor. The conversion of free or unrestricted spaces into P5, P30, P60, P120, and paid P240 spaces will severely restrict access for many students and residents who rely on on-street parking for daily life.

The reality is that many students do not have access to off-street parking. They often rent older flats that lack driveways or garages, live in overcrowded housing, and work irregular hours to make ends meet. They depend on being able to park close to where they live or study. For many, this is not about convenience, but about having the freedom and security to get to their job, placement, or class without adding another cost to an already strained budget.

This concern is particularly acute for students who fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Students with disabilities or long-term health conditions, for whom accessible and reliable parking is essential
- Student parents or caregivers, who need to transport young children and manage competing demands
- Students on professional placements, especially in healthcare, education, and social work, which often require driving to sites far from campus
- Students who work night shifts or outside public transport operating hours, such as in hospitality or security roles

These are not fringe cases. They reflect the everyday reality for a significant portion of the student population. By removing or heavily restricting parking without offering an accessible, affordable alternative, the Council risks making Albany Street and its surrounds functionally unliveable for many students.

We are also concerned about the cost of residential parking permits, which currently sit at \$237.43 per year. For a full-time student living on a low income, this is an unaffordable expense.

The cumulative impact of increasing costs across housing, food, and utilities has already left many students struggling. Adding a new cost simply to continue parking near one's home may lead to further displacement or increased stress.

We urge the Council to freeze or reduce permit costs for full-time students and to consider a needs-based approach for residential parking schemes. In addition, we recommend that at least the current number of unrestricted or all-day parking spaces be retained in the residential sections of Albany Street and adjoining streets. Any changes to parking must reflect the real needs of residents and not simply be based on theoretical traffic models or design preferences.

Equity and Accessibility for All Transport Modes

We support the long-term goal of reducing car dependency, but we reject any approach that forces mode shift by simply removing access. Mode shift must be supported, not imposed. Students and other low-income residents should not bear the brunt of change through the loss of essential services or increased cost. True equity means recognising that people use different modes of transport for different reasons and that structural barriers still limit many students' ability to walk, cycle, or take the bus.

It is important that the Council takes an integrated and compassionate approach to planning. Not all students can cycle. Not all jobs and lectures are close enough to walk to. Not all homes are connected to reliable public transport. These factors should not be treated as individual choices or failures. They are a reflection of the current urban and social landscape, which must be addressed gradually and inclusively.

Concerns about Tree Removal

We are disappointed to see the proposed removal of three mature trees outside the University Library to create new parking spaces. These trees contribute significantly to the street environment. They offer shade, shelter, and biodiversity, and play a vital role in stormwater management and cooling during hot weather. They are also part of the familiar and much-loved landscape students associate with the central campus area.

While the proposal includes planting native trees elsewhere, we note that newly planted trees take decades to match the ecological and aesthetic value of mature trees. In a time of intensifying climate challenges, the removal of healthy trees for car parking, even short-term parks, appears shortsighted and inconsistent with the project's stated goals of sustainability.

We urge the Council to explore alternative layouts that allow for tree retention, and where removal is unavoidable, commit to high-quality native replacement planting, including ongoing care, watering, and protection until maturity. Trees should never be treated as design inconveniences. They are critical urban infrastructure.

Engagement and Transparency

We thank the Council for reopening consultation on this phase of the project. However, we note that many students remain unaware of the full scope and implications of these proposed changes. The original hearings process in 2023 did not reach a wide student audience, and while the current consultation is an improvement, it remains too dependent on passive communication channels such as Council websites or media releases.

We encourage the Council to develop stronger partnerships with student organisations, the University of Otago, and local residential colleges to proactively engage young people in

decision-making. This is particularly important in a city like Dunedin, where students represent a significant and enduring demographic presence.

Additional Safety and Accessibility Concerns

As part of our wider support for a more accessible and sustainable Albany Street, we believe further changes are necessary to ensure the safety and usability of the corridor for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport users. We highlight the following concerns, which we believe must be addressed before the final design is implemented.

Bus Stop Placement and Pedestrian Safety

The current location of a major bus stop directly adjacent to a pedestrian crossing poses a serious safety concern. When buses pull in and passengers disembark, they are immediately deposited into a space of high pedestrian activity, with many choosing to cross the street directly rather than using the formal pedestrian crossing. This encourages risky behaviour, such as stepping out from behind or in front of buses, and creates a dangerous mix of foot traffic in an already congested area. Such design flaws can lead to confusion among drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians alike, increasing the likelihood of accidents and near misses.

We recommend that the relevant bus stop be relocated at least one block further east. This would create more separation between where passengers disembark and the designated crossing area, encouraging safer pedestrian behaviour and reducing the risk of people darting into traffic. It would also provide better sightlines for drivers and cyclists, helping all users of the street make more informed and timely decisions. A small change in placement can have a significant impact on overall street safety, and we urge the Council to take this matter seriously.

Cycleway Conflicts Near Bus Stops

A related concern involves the proposed cycleways running adjacent to bus stop locations. Under the current design, pedestrians exiting buses are expected to step directly into a live cycle lane. This creates a dangerous point of conflict between vulnerable pedestrians and oncoming cyclists, particularly during busy hours when both modes are heavily used. It is an accident waiting to happen, and one that could seriously undermine the project's otherwise commendable focus on safety and connectivity.

Cycleways should never cut directly across the path of disembarking bus passengers. This design creates split-second decision-making situations that put both cyclists and pedestrians at unnecessary risk. Instead, we recommend that the cycleway be rerouted via Frederick Street or another nearby route where adequate space exists to provide clear separation between pedestrian zones, cycleways, and bus infrastructure. Such a shift would not significantly compromise the overall connectivity of the cycle network, but it would dramatically improve safety for all users and help reduce friction between transport modes.

Visibility and Night-Time Safety at Pedestrian Crossings

Another critical issue we wish to raise is the need for adequate lighting along the length of Albany Street, particularly at pedestrian crossings and other high-footfall areas. This area is not only used throughout the day but often late into the night, with students walking home from study, work, or social activities. Many students live in flats spread across North Dunedin, and crossings along Albany Street are a vital part of their daily routes.

At night, visibility can be poor, and current lighting levels do not always provide the clarity needed for drivers or cyclists to safely see pedestrians, especially in bad weather. We urge the Council to ensure that all raised and painted crossings are accompanied by strong, focused street lighting that clearly illuminates waiting pedestrians from both directions of traffic. In a university precinct such as this, it is essential that active transport is not just encouraged during the day but made safe and welcoming at all hours. Ensuring that pedestrian crossings are well-lit is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent injury and increase trust in new infrastructure.

Relocation of Disability Parking and Increased Risk

We are also deeply concerned about the impact of relocating existing disability parking to Ethel Benjamin Place. While it is important to ensure there is designated accessible parking within the vicinity, the new location significantly increases the travel distance and introduces several barriers for disabled users trying to access the University campus. To reach lecture theatres, libraries, or the main campus hub, users of these disability parks must now cross Albany Street, a busy road with high levels of vehicle, cycle, and foot traffic.

This is not just an inconvenience — it is a serious accessibility and safety issue. For people with mobility impairments or chronic conditions, even short distances can become major obstacles. Crossing busy intersections introduces the risk of slips, falls, and collisions, especially when visibility is limited or traffic is moving unpredictably. In some cases, this change could make attending campus in person impossible or unnecessarily distressing.

We urge the Council to reconsider the location of disability parking in this corridor and to ensure that a safe, direct, and accessible route is available to all key campus destinations. Disability access should be viewed not as an afterthought or a box to be ticked, but as a fundamental element of inclusive urban design.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Dunedin City Council:

1. Retain a meaningful proportion of unrestricted or affordable all-day parking for students living on or near Albany Street
2. Expand access to residential parking permits and significantly reduce the cost for students and low-income residents
3. Preserve mature trees wherever possible and ensure any replacements offer genuine long-term ecological and aesthetic value
4. Commit to transport equity by considering the needs of students with disabilities, caregivers, shift workers, and placement-based students
5. Partner with student organisations in future transport and infrastructure projects to ensure that consultation is timely, inclusive, and reflective of student realities
6. Monitor the impact of these changes post-implementation and commit to adjusting them if hardship or displacement is evident

Conclusion

We support the goals of a connected, sustainable, and people-friendly city, but it must be a city for everyone. That includes the thousands of students who live, study, work, and contribute to the cultural and economic life of Dunedin every day. Infrastructure should not only improve safety and reduce emissions, but also protect affordability, preserve nature, and reduce hardship.

We urge the Council to take a balanced and student-conscious approach to the final stages of this project.

Ngā mihi,
Otago University Students' Association