

I am writing in favour of the yearlong pedestrianization of Wellington.

As a mother to three children, I have seen a dramatic change in the level of integration that my children have experienced since Wellington opened to its citizens over the summer. They interact more with their friends, their neighbours both old and young, and have become true members of the community. I experienced a similar sense of growth within my community these past few years.

I understand that feelings of community togetherness are hard to measure in concrete terms. It's hard to compete with commercial interests that we measure in dollars. It's hard to compete with people who claim to have logistical reasons for wanting to drive through the heart of our community in their cars. It's hard to compete with the status quo.

But please don't forget that the status quo has wrought havoc on real lives. The status quo suffocates our community spaces, our togetherness, our inclusiveness, our lungs. The status quo criminalizes the mere act of walking. The status quo hurts large segments of our community. The status quo makes invisible the lives of people we collectively decide don't matter.

Why have we accepted that the car is king? Why have we willingly given the very souls of our communities to the car? When did the word "accessibility" become synonymous with "car-friendly"? Is someone in their car somehow more important than me, when I walk? Are they more important than my child, when they simply want to cross a street? How is it better to allow cars to constantly oppress, harass, commit violence against us, all under the pretense of "accessibility"?

Let's not forget the members of our community that do not have the privilege of attending these public consultations. The underrepresented members that we don't hear from. As a neutral public consultation body, the OCPM is required to foster inclusivity – to reach out to community members that can't easily reach them. Can we really claim an equitable process when even our own children have been sidelined? When linguistic and cultural minorities feel too intimidated to speak? When we continue to give a larger platform to money interests and historically privileged demographics?

I am not originally from here, as I am sometimes reminded of when I propose “new” ideas. “Idealist” ideas. But my experiences growing up in cities across the world show me that none of this is idealist or even new. I don’t understand why we choose to hurt ourselves, damage our communities, foster isolation and loneliness, become increasingly polarized, and poison ourselves, again and again, through the policies we enact.

There are calls for more data, but is that really what we’re looking for? There are data and statistics and even economic evidence, thoroughly researched by respected institutions the world over, in support of these types of changes. I think the real question is whether we want to listen. Maybe we just want to keep things as they are and cover our ears.