

Earthquake prone buildings and priority routes consultation

We are responding to the document on priority routes: <https://wellington.govt.nz/have-your-say/public-inputs/consultations/open/priority-buildings>

Comments of Historic Places Wellington Inc.

About us

We are an independent incorporated society and registered charity, with a concern for heritage buildings in the wider Wellington region. For further information see our website: www.historicplaceswellington.org

General comment

This policy has important implications for owners of buildings identified as earthquake prone priority buildings in the identified priority route areas; potentially shortening the timeframe for remedial work (or demolition) from 15 years to 7.5 years. There will likely be far-reaching implications for heritage building owners and we believe a lot more pressure for demolition, which is of particular concern to us.

Proposed routes

We don't propose to comment on the identified routes as there are too many for us to consider the implications for all heritage buildings along these routes. We believe we must strike the right balance between perceived safety risks during an uncommon event like a major earthquake, and the knock-on economic and social costs of this imposed legislation. We wonder if too many routes have been identified, although we accept the council has applied various criteria such as traffic and pedestrian counts.

Heritage Buildings

We are pleased to note that Remediation relates to URM elements on the priority building that *could fall in a moderate earthquake onto the high traffic area and cause injury or death, not the entire building*. However, will you have a minimum set-back distance from the boundary that defines 'Priority' EPB elements? For example, if the building is set back from the thoroughfare/pavement by 5 or 10 metres, does this still require the same action?

It is good that there is an opportunity for owners of Category 1 heritage buildings to apply for an up to 10 year time extension. But that still leaves Category 2 owners without this possibility. It is also good that the council document has listed sources of financial support. However, we believe not all owners who seek financial assistance will receive it. We understand that grants are not usually paid until completion of the work and we are aware of at least one owner of a heritage building given a grant that they have had difficulty in the meantime securing bank finance to complete the work (when the grant will become available).

Closing comment

We are very concerned at the scale and timeframes of this legislation/policy change, especially for owners of heritage buildings on the identified routes. There could be enormous pressure on private owners to find the financial resources and on the design and building industry to complete the necessary work in the short timeframe. We think this has the potential for changing some of the streetscapes of Wellington through demolition.

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