

Councillor Wilkinson’s call for “naked streets”

Ian Radbone, 22 October 2018

At Adelaide City Council meeting of 14 August 2018 Councillor Sandy Wilkinson put the following motion on notice (Item 11.7):

‘That Council:

- . Notes the principle of Naked Streets in so much that line marking and associated ‘traffic and parking signage’ or ‘street signage’, within the City of Adelaide, should only be implemented where absolutely required, with a view to minimising unnecessary visual clutter in city streets; ^[1]_[SEP]
- . Requests Administration undertake research into the principles of NAKED STREETS (including precedents in other cities), Reporting back to Council by March 2019 how these principles could be applied to minimise excess line marking and signage in the City of Adelaide; ^[1]_[SEP]
- . Requests Administration further provide in such a report to Council the inclusion of recommendations that would be required to update Council's policies and guidelines, along with options for applying any change retrospectively to city streets.’ ^[1]_[SEP]

The motion also included two photos. The first was of Stanley Street, portrayed as a “naked” street due to its lack of line-marking.



This was captioned “Ideal residential street with minimal line-marking”.

Against this ideal was juxtaposed this photo of Childers Street, North Adelaide, as an “example of excessive line-marking”.



The ideal residential street is a no-through road – with pedestrian and cyclist cut-throughs at the end, of course. In such cases line marking should be kept to a minimum. Unfortunately Childers Street is not like that. The map below has the position of the two photos indicated in red.



Childers Street runs between Jeffcott Street and O’Connell Street – both major streets. Stanley Street looks similarly connected to the street network but is in fact practically a no through road, only connecting to Mann Terrace, a grandly-named lane that itself goes nowhere. The other streets leading off it are similarly minor and narrow.

So although very wide, Stanley Street is a quiet residential street – the sort that Councillor Wilkinson argues don't need lots of line marking. I agree, and wish that local councils would not be so keen to paint centre lines that discourage motorists from using the other side of the road when passing cyclists.

Childers Street is not a no through road, and is also very wide. A problem of very wide streets is that it encourages motorists to drive faster. In Childers Street, traffic engineers have encouraged people to drive slower by narrowing the road width using bike lanes, which themselves have been set away from parked cars. (Of course that might not be the only reason that bike lanes were added.) A buffer between angled parking and the bike lane is required under the Austroads guidance because of the danger that reversing motorists cause to cyclists. Arguably the chevron markings in this buffer zone are ugly, but also a cheaper treatment than (say) coloured pavement. At intersections, they are particularly obtrusive but a cheap short-term treatment compared to the ideal of extending the verge.

If traffic volumes are low (i.e. about 1000 vehicles a day or less) and 85th percentile speeds 30km/h or so, then the bike lanes (and centre line) are probably not needed either. Council staff have been asked to provide a report to Council. Presumably the report will include data on traffic volumes and speeds.

Naked streets

There are plenty of streets in Adelaide's suburbs that don't have paint on them. Typically Councils and residents have never seen the need for line markings. The concept of naked streets by contrast is relatively new. The father of the concept was the Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman. His work was popularised in the Anglophone world by [Ben Hamilton-Baillie](#).

"Naked streets" have also been embraced in the UK, where their standard approach to main streets includes much higher levels of "clutter" than ours, with pedestrian fencing a standard feature. Compared to the UK, many of our main streets would seem to have been designed on naked street principles already!

Monderman's concept of naked streets applies to quite busy locations, typically intersections, not quiet residential streets. Monderman's designs were far more than simply removing paint. They were carefully landscaped to encourage people to interact with each other, whether on foot, behind a steering wheel or on a bike. My wife and I visited a few locations whether these principles were applied when on a bike tour of northern Europe in 2010.

The Dutch town of Haren has had its main street redesigned on naked street (shared space) principles.



This “roundabout” below is in Bohmte, North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). We had to wait until there was no traffic, so the circular brick pattern can be seen. It is on a freight route that carries over 20,000 vehicles per day!



Video of this shows the various users trying to make sense of how it was to be used and signalling to other users their intentions.

While these examples are quite sophisticated, that does not mean that equal sophistication is needed when addressing quiet residential streets. I’m sympathetic with Cr. Wilkinson’s call for less “clutter” on streets. But in the case of Childers Street I would need to know more about how it was used before I would be comfortable with the removal of bike lanes.