

Thank You for Allowing Us to Speak

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Abstract

In *Thank You for Allowing Us To Speak*, youth pedestrian activists Nitya Jaiswal (13) and Radha Patel (18) - supported by Auckland-based urban strategist, Boopsie Maran - describe images from their parallel traffic safety campaigns.

Across Auckland, families feel the streets students must use between their home and the school gate are growing to be more hostile than ever before. Particularly, in the city centre, their environment lacks shade and safe separation from car traffic, and often includes crossing the entrance to a motorway. While the kids themselves understand that walking and using active modes is a sustainable route, they just wish their streets were made safer by adult drivers, often the ones speeding to work.

This photo essay highlights the inherent challenges faced by students on and off the streets—whether at a traffic circle or at local board offices sitting opposite elected members. Through captions and selected images, Jaiswal and Patel speak frankly to their intended adult audience and detail in their own words the “consequences, for [those] of you who are wondering.”

Keywords: public open space, inclusive transportation, child-centred design, walkability, urban planning engagement

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New Zealand ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. This commitment included the child's right to speak out and be heard on matters affecting their right to play and move safely through their public realm. In 2023, in a context where infrastructure improvement timelines stretch from as little as a few months to decades, the city of Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland still finds itself excluding young voices from the co-design process of streets and public open spaces. Responding to this problem, two young women challenged the status quo through direct and purposeful advocacy. This photo essay, a mix of still-frame images from public comment and a safety campaign documentary, provides a lens into the advocacy spaces of two youth pedestrian activists, Nitya Jaiswal (13) and Radha Patel (18).

In 2021, Nitya Jaiswal (then aged 10) paired with the urban strategy collective, Places for Good, to lead walking tours, bringing attention to the traffic dangers on her daily walk to Freemans Bay School. Explains Jaiswal, "When the engineers walked with me to school, it didn't take them long to realise that my vision needed to turn to reality. It was only a matter of creating/changing a few signs, crossings, and roads. Unfortunately, these poorly planned roads and crossings are situated all over the country, and the government's slowness isn't helping at all. They may think they are saving money for bigger 'more important' projects, but they have jarred the next generation's lives."

Radha Patel (18) never imagined that she would become one of the youngest transportation activists in New Zealand. What started as a student petition for a pedestrian crossing to her local board in 2019 resulted in a lengthy pedestrian advocacy campaign presented across multiple government agencies in public input from December 2022 to March 2023. Altogether, Radha presented to her school board, Waitemata Local Board, the Auckland Council Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and the Auckland Transport Board. Patel reflects, "If these systems were more inviting, we could create space for more young people to have their ideas heard and needs met. Youth participation is essential to ensure that we have a society fit for serving the health and well-being needs of this group, which has been left out of this decision-making process for far too long."

References

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Figure 1. "Cars whooshing centimeters away from me - this is what my unsafe city life is like."
- Nitya, age 13. Credit: Pippa Coom, 2017



Figure 2. "The team is calling for safety on school roads. These wonderful people are trying to make the vision come true." - Nitya, age 13. Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2023



Figure 3. "Before: A car casually parked on the pathway. It's not like these things happen everyday..." - Nitya, age 13. Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2018



Figure 4. "After my walking tour: Plants protect the pathway from any potential parkers who may decide to break the NZ road code. There are consequences, for [those] of you who are wondering..." - Nitya, age 13
Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2019



Figure 5. “Adventurers/students going through dangerous hurdles to school (like this one!)” - Nitya, age 13
Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2019



Figure 6. “I was a year nine student when my secondary (high) school students went to our local board to present this petition. I would like to know that the future generations of students can cross this road safely before I graduate year 13 at the end of this year.” - Radha, age 18. Credit: Boopsie Maran, date unknown



Figure 7. “The way society is set up, it’s hard for young people to participate in these conversations and be talked down to. We have to prove ourselves to have a voice first, and even then, our ideas are minimised, watered down, and go unheard.” - Radha, age 18. Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2020



Figure 8. “Here we see MP for Auckland Central Chlöe Swarbrick listening to the ideas of high school-aged students instead of making decisions for us without consultation.” - Radha, age 18
Credit: Luke McKeown, with permission



Figure 9. "I feel proud to see what my school's student-led sustainability group has achieved; however, we could not have done it without the support of our community and decision-makers who guided us along this challenging and unfamiliar journey." - Radha, age 18. Credit: Boopsie Maran, 2024



01.12.2022 - Komiti mō ngā Tūnuku me ngā Rawa Tūāhanga/Transport and Infrastructure Committee-Item 5

Figure 10. "While these systems aren't designed for young people we must have a seat at the table and feel empowered to participate and not just exist in them as young people deserve to grow up feeling safe in public spaces." - Radha, age 18. Credit:Auckland Council Transport Committee



254 PONSONBY RD

A COMMUNITY-LED DESIGN PROJECT (CLD)

Figure 11. The Official Public Open Space Opening Early 2025 - LANDLAB - Local Board



Figure 12. Parking Spot to Parklet exploring public Open Space - Sep 21
(Pippa Coom, 2017)



Figure 13. PARK(ing) Day - Auckland - September 21, 2018 - Women in Urbanism Aotearoa Taking over car parks and making them into beautiful fun and lively spaces. Credit Boopsie Maran.



Figure 14. September 20, 2019 World PARK(ing) Day - Kowhai Intermediate School Students Build Parklet to address speeds around school. Credit: Boopsie Maran.



Figure 15. October 11, 2020 Palmerston North PARK(ing) Day addressing bike vs. car.
Credit: Boopsie Maran.



Figure 16. artspace vs. carspace. Credit: Boopsie Maran.



Figure 17. Parklets to Petition Sep 18, 2020. Credit: Boopsie Maran.



Figure 18. Rose Road Sep 22 2020. Credit: Luke McKeown.



Figure 19. Dec 5, 2020, Hula Hoop Parklet Party. Credit: author.



Figure 20. Road Closure and Petition Promotion Event. Credit: author.