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# Active Transport

Transport Australia Society Discussion Paper

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April 2019



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## Purpose

This document has been produced by the Transport Australia society of Engineers Australia as a discussion paper on the topic of active transport. It does not represent a formal position statement of Engineers Australia, but is intended to inform discussion on the benefits of active transport in managing travel demand and addressing environmental and health challenges.

## Background

The Australian Institute of Health and Wellness released *Australia's health 2018* on 20 June 2018 which provides a series of analytical and statistical snapshots of contemporary issues for the health of Australians. The report indicates that in 2016, the leading cause of death for males in Australia was cardiovascular disease and reported that excess weight and obesity are major risk factors for cardiovascular disease, along with type 2 diabetes, some musculoskeletal conditions and some cancers.<sup>1</sup> In the 2011/12 FY, the cost to the economy and health system due to almost one-quarter of children and two-thirds of adults being overweight or obese was estimated to be \$8.6 billion.

A leading cause of obesity in Australia is a lack of physical activity. The Australian Sports Commission's AusPlay survey for 2016/2017 FY revealed that the most popular sport and leisure physical activities for adults aged over 18 was recreational walking and athletics, including jogging.<sup>2</sup>

Australia's health 2018 provides a snapshot of physical activity levels based on self-reported data from the Australia Bureau of Statistics National Health Survey, in the 2014/2015 FY, in which 56% of adults reported not completing the recommended minimum physical activity of 150 minutes at a moderate intensity or 75 minutes at a vigorous intensity across 5 or more sessions per week.<sup>3</sup> This data also revealed that of the 40% of adults aged between 18-64:

- 16% walked for transport as their only type of physical activity
- 11% walked for exercise only
- 13% walked for both exercise and transport as their only type of physical activity.

Adults aged 18–64 living in Inner regional or Outer regional and remote areas are, on average, more likely to fail to undertake sufficient physical activity (at 58% and 60% respectively) than those living in Major cities (50%).**Error! Bookmark not defined.** One of the major differences between these different areas is the provision of active transport infrastructure.

In the 2018/2019 FY federal government funding of \$154.3 million has been announced to support Australians to take up healthier and more active lifestyles, including participating in community sport.

## The role of active transport

To encourage greater physical activity in Australia, all levels of government should be committing funding to infrastructure to support more walkable cities and regions. This should include inter-regional connections for pedestrians and cyclists and active transport infrastructure to support horse and mountain bike trails.

Encouraging walking and cycling as a method of transport for full or partial journeys requires significant infrastructure funding. Improving physical activity levels for Australians adults will reduce the burden on the health system.

Active transport infrastructure is one of the most powerful urban planning tools for enhancing the safety, accessibility and liveability of a city. Effective and efficient active travel facilities have been proven to transform the relative attractiveness of precincts within many cities across the world. The resultant increase in population supports local economies and, provides passive surveillance contributing to personal safety for longer periods.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Healthy Liveable Communities was established in 2016. The objective of the CRE is to develop a validated set of health and urban policy

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government. 2018: Australia's Health 2018, Australian Institute of Health and Wellness, viewed 2 July 2018, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/australias-health-2018/contents/table-of-contents>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government 2016, AusPlay Participation data for the sport sector, Australian Sports Commission, viewed 2 July 2018, [https://www.ausport.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/653875/34648\\_AusPlay\\_summary\\_report\\_accessible\\_FINAL\\_updated\\_211216.pdf](https://www.ausport.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/653875/34648_AusPlay_summary_report_accessible_FINAL_updated_211216.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

indicators in order to create healthy, liveable and equitable communities. The CRE developed *Creating Liveable Cities Scorecards* as a baseline to measure liveability in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth.

One of the key recommendations was for State Governments to set ambitious targets, particularly for transport planners and engineers, to invest in infrastructure that encourages walking and cycling for transport to work for inner as well as outer suburban areas.<sup>4</sup>

## International active travel initiatives

In the United Kingdom, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) began consultation in early 2019 on new quality statements for the design of streets and roads in an effort to deliver the best health outcomes for the general population. The most relevant quality statements to transport planners and engineers are

- **Quality statement 1: Physical Activity Champions**  
Local authorities and healthcare commissioners have a senior level physical activity champion to oversee the development and implementation of local strategies, policies and plans.
- **Quality statement 2: Travel Routes**  
Local authorities develop and maintain connected travel routes that prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and people who use public transport.
- **Quality statement 3 : Public open spaces**  
Local authorities involve community and voluntary groups in designing and managing public open spaces.<sup>5</sup>

## Australian active travel initiatives

The Active Transport website has been developed by the Western Australian (WA) Department of Transport to bring together the Department's cycling and walking activities and behaviour change programs (TravelSmart and Living Smart).

To sustainably support a projected population of 3.5 million by 2050, the WA state government framework for land use planning and infrastructure delivery for Perth and Peel regions, has acknowledged the need for greater emphasis on the provision of high quality, safe and comfortable pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.<sup>6</sup>

The WA government and Queensland (QLD) governments, recognise that the uptake in electric bikes and other electric mobility devices is an opportunity to allow communities to travel longer distances without the need for private vehicles.

While these electrically aided devices do not assist communities in reaching their required activity levels, the lessened reliance on the private vehicle aids in improving the perceived safety of those that are walking and cycling.

## Capturing the value of active travel

Historically, capturing the external benefits in the evaluation of active transport infrastructure has been limited, partly due to data and information availability. Advancing the analysis of externalities in project evaluation will present more compelling cases for active travel infrastructure and pave the way for transport infrastructure to provide wider benefits to communities.

In an effort to quantify the benefits, the Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads have developed a method for determining the economic return on cycling networks based on population data, user profiles and separated/unseparated paths, which has been developed as part of a business case for the Cycling Infrastructure Program.<sup>7</sup> The first and most important step in being able to undertake the business case was cycle network planning.

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<sup>4</sup> RMIT University Centre for Urban Research, *Creating Liveable Cities in Australia – Scorecards*, viewed 1 February 2019, <http://cur.org.au/project/creating-liveable-cities-australia-scorecard-priority-recommendations-perth-sydney-melbourne-brisbane/>

<sup>5</sup> National Institute for Healthcare Excellence, *Physical activity: encouraging activity in the general population*, 2019 <https://www.nice.org.uk/consultations/50/1/quality-statements>

<sup>6</sup> Western Australia Government Department of Planning Lands and Heritage, *Perth and Peel @ 3.5 million*, viewed 1 February 2019, <https://www.dplh.wa.gov.au/perth-and-peel-@-3-5-million>

<sup>7</sup> Fishman E., Garrard J., Ker I., Litman T., 2011: *Cost and Health Benefit of Active Transport in Queensland: Research and Review*, Stage One Report. Prepared by CATALYST for Health Promotion Queensland

Improved data collection also aids further development of the cost benefit ratio to emphasise the health benefits, which comprise approximately 75% of the project benefits.<sup>8</sup> This could be further refined with the inclusion of heart rate data collected during active transport surveys of existing infrastructure around the country.

The newly installed cycle counter on Brisbane's Bicentennial Bikeway reached the milestone of over 1 million trips in 2018, highlighting the value of the installation of quality bicycle infrastructure for the community. With daily trips averaging over 4,000 this bikeway is ranked amongst the world's top 10 bikeways according to data from over 50 countries and 200 permanent counters.<sup>9</sup>

Quantifying the cost benefit ratio of active transport infrastructure will allow for a federal funding system similar to the Black Spot Program which was rolled out to reduce the national road toll under the National Road Safety Action Plan 2018-20. The Australian Government will provide \$744.5 million to the Black Spot Program from the 2013/14 FY to the 2021/22 FY, with an on-going commitment of \$60 million each year following. This funding is in an effort to reduce the financial and emotional costs to Australians as a result of road crashes each year.

The Queensland Government has committed to the development of the Queensland Walking Strategy with a \$2.5 million investment over the next three years. This investment needs to be supported by additional funding to improve active transport infrastructure.

Current trends point toward increasing traffic congestion and large scale transport infrastructure costs compromising the accessibility, safety and health of Australia's cities. Active travel infrastructure is the vital link in maximising and sustaining the liveability of Australia's cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This can be achieved through greater integration of safe, convenient and comfortable active travel corridors with urban land uses and mass transit nodes.

## Recommendation

The Transport Australia Society proposes that Engineers Australia recommends that the federal government provides funding to state and local governments to support active transport infrastructure. For example, a program similar to the Black Spot Program should be developed in support greater uptake of walking and cycling to key employment and transport hubs, particularly from outer suburban areas.

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<sup>8</sup> Australian Government, 2018: National Road Safety Action Plan, Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities, Canberra

<sup>9</sup> Ruth Parker, October 12 2018, The Brisbane Times, *Brisbane bikeway clocks 1 million trips in 2018*, <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/brisbane-bikeway-clocks-1-million-trips-in-2018-20181012-p5099n.html>



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