

Active Transport

Critical Policy Brief



This policy brief draws upon the expertise of RMIT's transport research community to inform policy makers and the wider community on the critical challenge of increasing participation in active transport.

The benefits of shifting from private car travel to active transport modes, such as walking and cycling, are well recognised and have been promoted by both national and state governments.¹ Yet active transport rates in Australia remain low in comparison with many European and Asian countries. Especially concerning is the decline in active transport among children, with less than a third of Australian children now regularly walking or cycling to school.

Overview

The benefits of active transport are recognised in health, transport and urban planning fields. Active transport reduces congestion in the road network and can reduce infrastructure costs, as well as delivering health benefits through physical activity and disease prevention. In Brisbane, for example, active transport has been estimated to gain 33,000 health-adjusted life years by 2026, generating net savings of \$183 million.²

“Globally, physical inactivity causes 3 million deaths per year. One of the most effective means of increasing physical activity is through urban planning and transport policies” (World Health Organization, 2009)³

Active transport delivers environmental benefits by contributing to lower air and noise pollution, with positive flow-on health outcomes. Infrastructure that supports walking and cycling also contributes to social equity and inclusion goals, providing opportunities for low-cost modes of travel.

However, active transport uptake in Australia remains very low in comparison with many European and Asian countries,

Key Messages

- Urban planning and transport policies are important levers for encouraging active transport. Active transport is supported by high residential densities, well-connected streets, local destinations and services, and high-quality pedestrian and cycling infrastructure.
- To achieve the Plan Melbourne goal to create a city of walkable, 20-minute neighbourhoods, Melbourne's residential density target needs to be raised from 15 dwellings per hectare to at least 25 dwellings per hectare.
- Only 1% of Australians cycle to work and safety concerns impact upon cycling uptake, particularly among younger and older riders. Significant investment in cycling infrastructure is required, including the design of traffic calming features such as separated cycle lanes and controlled crossings that enhance cyclist safety.
- Provision of high quality public transport with active transport connections increases the distances accessible by active modes of transport. This can be supported by developing walking and cycling infrastructure around public transport facilities.

with only 4% of the Australian workforce commuting by walking and only 1% by cycling.⁴ The number of Australian children walking or cycling to school has halved over the past 40 years, with less than a third now regularly walking or cycling to school.⁵ A comprehensive cross-sectoral strategy is needed to increase the number of Victorians using active transport modes. This policy brief highlights the need to: build walkable neighbourhoods; further develop proximity-based planning policies; increase investment in cycling

infrastructure and education; and coordinate active transport and public transport provision.

Build neighbourhoods that encourage active transport

A walkable neighbourhood encourages local living, with people being able to safely and conveniently walk or cycle to their preferred destinations. Walkable neighbourhoods have high residential density and a well-connected, safe pedestrian street network. Higher residential densities provide the foundations for well-serviced public transport infrastructure and locally accessible destinations, goods, and services. However, dwelling densities in Melbourne remain low and Plan Melbourne 2017-2050 has set a relatively unambitious density target of 15 dwellings per hectare. To realise the goal of creating a city of walkable, 20-minute neighbourhoods, a residential density target of at least 25 dwellings per hectare is needed.⁶

Urban planning and transport policies are strong and direct mechanisms to spur active transport. Proximity-related planning policies in Victoria, such as mandated distances to supermarkets and public transport stops, promote integrated planning that encourages uptake of active transport. Universal access to active transport is supported by infrastructure such as footpaths and cycle lanes around public transport stops, retail precincts and employment hubs. Car park pricing and availability policies can also discourage private vehicle use where public transport services are available. It is important that these policies guide the development of new residential housing and activity hubs, and that their implementation is monitored to assess outcomes.

Invest in Cycling Infrastructure and Education

Australia's low rates of commuter cycling reflect a substantial under-investment in cycling infrastructure. Promoting cycling as a convenient, healthy and safe travel mode requires development of connected bicycle networks and improved links to existing cycle paths. Cycling can be made more accessible for people of all ages and abilities by providing separated cycle

lanes on major cycling corridors. Traffic calming features such as separated cycle lanes and controlled crossings enhance cyclist safety, which is especially important in encouraging cycling among younger and older riders. In Australia, Canberra has been most successful in increasing commuter cycling rates, achieving a 15% increase in cycling to work between 2011 and 2016.⁷ This is supported by an integrated Active Travel Framework, an Active Travel Office to coordinate policy implementation, and major investment in cycling-related infrastructure and education.⁸

Coordinate Active Transport Infrastructure and Public Transport Provision

Integrated local and regional planning enhances mobility and access to destinations, improving social equity and health outcomes. Active transport and public transport are complementary, with the majority of public transport journeys involving walking or cycling. The provision of high quality public transport with active transport connections increases the distances accessible by modes other than car. There are opportunities to promote active transport aligned to public transport use by developing walking and cycling infrastructure around public transport facilities. This involves planning safe, connected cycle and walkways to public transport services, as well as developing urban green spaces along walking and cycling pathways.

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¹ These have included: the National Cities Performance Framework, the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020; the National Cycling Strategy 2011–16; Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, Direction 5.1; Infrastructure Victoria (2018), Five Year Focus: Immediate Actions to Tackle Congestion, Recommendation 9.

² Zapata-Diomedes B, Knibbs LD, Ware RS, Heesch KC, Tainio M, Woodcock J, Lennert Veerman, J. (2017), 'A shift from motorised travel to active transport: What are the potential health gains for an Australian city?', *PLoS ONE*, 12(10).

³ World Health Organization (2009), Interventions of diet and physical activity: What works. Summary report. Geneva.

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census.

⁵ Active Healthy Kids Australia (2015), The Road Less Travelled: The 2015 Active Healthy Kids Australia Progress Report Card on Active Transport for Children and Young People, Adelaide, South Australia.

⁶ Arundel J, Lowe M, Hooper P, Roberts R, Rozek J, Higgs C, Giles-Corti B. (2017), Creating liveable cities in Australia: Mapping urban policy implementation and evidence-based national liveability indicators. RMIT, Melbourne.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). 2016 Census: Australian Capital Territory. 141/2017. Canberra.

⁸ Transport Canberra, Active Transport Office website, accessed 9 August 2018.